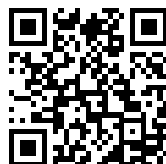

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THE 2nd BATTALION
WILTSHIRE REGIMENT
(99th)

A Record of their Fighting in
the Great War, 1914-18



62nd

**HISTORY OF 2ND BATTALION
WILTSHIRE REGIMENT, 1914-18**



THE 2nd BATTALION
WILTSHIRE REGIMENT
(99th)

**A Record of their Fighting in
the Great War, 1914-18**

BY
MAJOR W. S. SHEPHERD, M.C.
(Adjutant 1915-1916, Second-in-Command, 1917-1918.)

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NOTE

IN compiling this record I have endeavoured to include as much useful data as possible.

The fact that friends, with whom one had been so closely united in the field, dispersed to all quarters of the globe almost immediately demobilization commenced, rendered this more difficult. I ask those who peruse this work to make allowances for such errors and omissions they may discover. I am indebted to a number of those who served with the Battalion for their assistance; in particular Lieut.-Colonel J. F. Forbes, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel R. M. T. Gillson, D.S.O., and Lieut.-Colonel A. V. P. Martin, D.S.O., who in turn so ably piloted the 2nd Wiltshire Regiment through the most important actions of the campaign; Lieut.-Colonel (then Captain) A. W. Timmis, M.C., whose war career, together with so many others, was cut short at the First Battle of Ypres, and who commanded the Battalion in India at the time this book was completed; and Lieutenant (then Acting-Captain) A. J. Samut, M.C., who had such wide experience during his long war service with the Battalion, filling as he did from time to time all the rôles from Platoon Commander to Command of the Battalion.

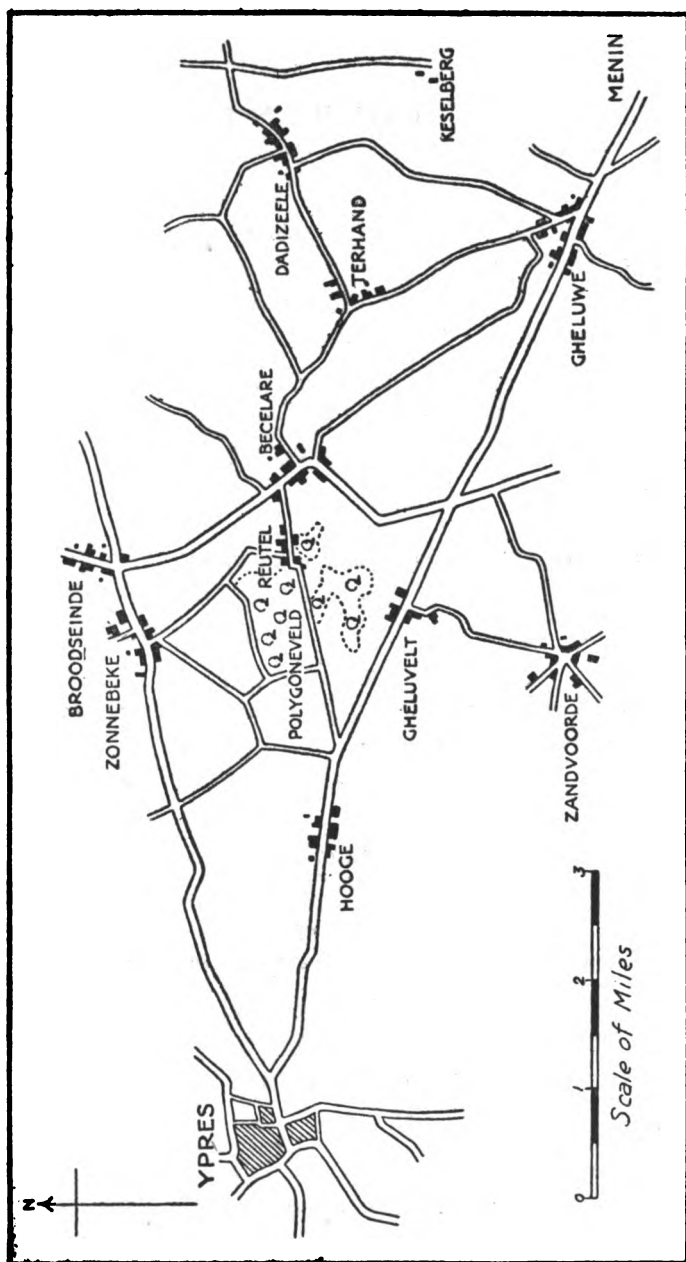
I did not join the Battalion until after the First Battle of Ypres, and Colonel Forbes's excellent description of this immemorial defence, written during his internment in Holland, made my first chapter possible.

W. SCOTT SHEPHERD.

London, 1925.

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THE 2nd BATTALION WILTSHIRE REGIMENT (99TH)

A Record of their Fighting in the Great War, 1914-18

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES. 1914.

WHEN the first clouds of the Great War burst over Europe, the 2nd Battalion The Duke of Edinburgh's Wiltshire Regiment—changed in 1920 to The Wiltshire Regiment (Duke of Edinburgh's)—the 99th Regiment of Foot, was stationed at Gibraltar.

Leaving Gibraltar for England.
August 31st.

Trained to the highest pitch, a more readily prepared body of men could not have been found to serve their country in time of emergency.

From the moment the news that war had been declared reached Gibraltar, the "Moonrakers," as the 99th are known, longed to join in the struggle. Patience was strained whilst waiting for their place to be taken on the "Rock," but no time was lost in making preparations, and they were ready and waiting for departure when relief arrived.

Thus it was that the appropriately christened s.s. *Edinburgh Castle* sailed gracefully from the South Mole on the morning of August 31st, 1914, with the 2nd Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment aboard. She seemed proud of what she carried, as she cut majestically through the water, amid a chorus of shrieks from the sirens of other ships in the port.

To look at the cheerful faces of the men on the decks, one could not have imagined that they were hustling off to be hurled into the fiercest fighting in history. No man on board knew his destiny, but spirits were high and there was a healthy craving to get at the throats of Britain's enemies.

Lieut.-Colonel J. F. Forbes commanded. With him the following officers embarked:—

Major J. R. Wyndham, Senior Major.

Major C. A. Law, commanding "B" Company.

Captain A. W. Timmis, commanding "A" Company.

Captain E. L. W. Henslow, commanding "D" Company.

Captain H. F. Coddington, commanding "C" Company.

Captain C. G. M. Carter.

Captain C. H. E. Moore.

Captain G. Le Huquet.

Captain R. P. Culver, Adjutant.

Lieutenant R. Smith.

Lieutenant A. S. Hooper.

Lieutenant J. M. Ponsford.

Lieutenant A. H. Bleckley.

Lieutenant D. A. Ansted.

Lieutenant E. Spencer.

Lieutenant G. Macnamara.

Lieutenant J. McL. Down.

2/Lieutenant F. L. D. Shelford.

2/Lieutenant O. J. Calley.

2/Lieutenant M. R. Fowle.

2/Lieutenant R. P. Rogers.

Lieutenant and Quartermaster S. Hewitt.

Captain K. Comyn, R.A.M.C., Medical Officer.

Other ranks numbered 876, and there were 47 women and 76 children. Lieutenant W. M. Geddes and five other ranks were left behind in hospital; also two non-commissioned officers whose wives were ill and four soldiers employed by the Governor.

His Excellency Sir H. S. G. Miles, Governor and Commander-in-Chief at Gibraltar, addressed the following letter to Colonel Forbes as the Battalion embarked:—

"As I had no opportunity of addressing the Regiment before their embarkation, I shall be glad if you will convey to the Battalion my appreciation of their soldierlike conduct and behaviour during their stay at Gibraltar. They have maintained the reputation of their Regiment, and the good order and regularity of their embarkation reflects credit upon all concerned. I feel sure that if they take the field they will do good service and add to the good name the Regiment has always possessed."

The s.s. *Edinburgh Castle* was first escorted by H.M.S. *Albion*, but later these duties were taken

over by H.M.S. *Minerva*. The voyage was all that could be wished for.

A little entertainment was provided when the *Minerva* sank a vessel flying the Austro-Hungarian flag, after transferring the crew of twenty-one to the *Edinburgh Castle*, where they were made prisoners.

Southampton was reached on September 3rd at about 11 p.m. The tedious work of disembarkation was got on with at once, and by mid-day on the 4th the 2nd Wiltshires found themselves, lock, stock and barrel, at Lyndhurst Camp, New Forest.

Here, under Major-General T. Capper, the 7th Division was being formed as follows:—

Formation of the
7th Division.

20th Brigade.

- 1st Grenadier Guards.
- 2nd Scots Guards.
- 2nd Gordon Highlanders.
- 2nd Border Regiment.

21st Brigade.

- 2nd Yorkshire Regiment.
- 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment.
- 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers.
- 2nd Wiltshire Regiment.

22nd Brigade.

- 2nd Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment.
- 2nd Warwickshire Regiment.
- 2nd Staffordshire Regiment.
- 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers.
- 54th and 55th Field Companies, R.E.
- No. 7 Signal Company.
- 22nd and 35th Brigades, R.F.A.
- 3rd, 111th and 112th R.G.A.
- 14th Brigade R.H.A.
- Northumberland Yeomanry.

The 21st Brigade was placed under the command of Brig.-General H. E. Watts, C.B., C.M.G.

In the same area the usual divisional Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, etc., etc., were in process of organization. It took a month at Lyndhurst to equip completely and assemble the Division, but at the end of that time it was perfection.

In addition to those officers who sailed from Gibraltar, the following joined the Battalion at Lyndhurst.

- Captain A. C. Magor.
- 2/Lieutenant C. H. R. Barnes.
- 2/Lieutenant G. P. Oldfield.

2/Lieutenant E. L. Betts.
2/Lieutenant F. Rylands.
2/Lieutenant W. P. Campbell.
2/Lieutenant E. H. A. H. Burges.

Whilst in camp, the Colonel of the Regiment, General Sir John Dunne, addressed the Battalion as follows:—

“Yesterday it was sixty-two years since I first joined the Wiltshire Regiment. For over twenty years I served in your Battalion, and since leaving it this is the third time I have come to wish you ‘God speed’ on your departure for war service. The first was when you went to the Zulu War in 1879; the second when you started for South Africa in 1899; and now, my dear old 99th, that I once commanded for over twelve happy years, you are about to set forth to the most righteous war that our country has ever engaged in. You will be fighting not only for the honour and glory of England and your Wiltshire Regiment, but absolutely for the freedom of your fathers and mothers, your wives and children, your sisters and sweet-hearts. For should we be beaten by these Germans now, we shall be their slaves in the future and suffer like the poor Belgians have done. You have got as fine a leader in Colonel Forbes as could be found, and he and his most capable officers are devoted to their men, who, I trust, will follow them with faith and implicit obedience. For you will have strenuous and incessant fighting and much hardship, calling for courage, endurance and perfect discipline. But every man amongst you will be cheered through it all by the knowledge that he is showing more true self-sacrifice in this life and death struggle for his country’s safety than has ever been called for in any bygone war. That you will all bear these farewell words in mind through the whole campaign, and that the great God of battles will help and strengthen you, will be your old Colonel’s unceasing prayer.”

October 4th.

Leaving Lyndhurst with the Division, the Wiltshires marched to Southampton and there embarked. The s.s. *Turcoman* carried the right half and the s.s. *Cestrian* the left half of the Battalion, and both boats sailed away on the evening of October 5th.

Moving along the coast to the east, the convoy stopped off Dover, and the actual crossing was not made until the following night.

Daybreak on the 7th saw the Battalion disembarked at Zeebrugge. Later the companies entrained for Bruges, and from there marched to Assbrouck, the transport doing the whole way by road. Assbrouck, lying some three miles from Bruges, was a typical drab Belgian village, and was the men's first taste of many such that accommodated them later.

October 7th.
Landing at
Zeebrugge

At the time the 7th Division was launched on Belgian ground the situation was roughly as follows: The great German drive for Paris had failed. So hopelessly had it failed that it turned our retreat from Mons into a victory that will never be forgotten. But it was up to the Huns to make another drive, before the French were too well prepared, and before the British could collect the full strength of their force from their widespread Colonies. For many reasons this new "push," which was imminent, was expected to come from the north of Belgium, with the Channel ports as objective.

The Wiltshires returned to Bruges on October 8th, and were ordered to entrench four miles west of the town. Further orders were received before the work was commenced, and a march was made in two stages to Ostend, halting one night at Clemskerke.

Ostend presented a sad sight to those who had known it in peaceful days. Gay as it was up to the day war started, the town seemed now to be mesmerized by overhanging disaster. Nothing very exciting happened during the Battalion's three days' stay there, but it was known that the German masses were bearing down on the town from the direction of Antwerp, and two companies were always kept on outpost duty.

Ostend.

The British evacuated the town on October 13th. The Wiltshires, entraining for Roulers, were the last to leave. They afterwards learned that the Germans entered Ostend the same day, following closely on their heels.

A night was spent in the train at Roulers, and the next morning the Division marched to Ypres. The 2nd Wiltshires were detailed as right flank guard, but the march was made without event, and the troops settled down for the night in the Kaiserine Barracks.

October 14th.
Arrival at Ypres.

Everyone knows of Ypres now. To-day it is a sacred spot. Though but little known then to the

average Englishman, the old town played a big part in the history of Flanders. British blood had been spilt there before, notably in the year of Cromwell's death, when British men wrested it from the Spaniards. But that was sport compared to what the men of the 7th Division were in for.

It was known, when the Division entered Ypres, that the German masses, moving fast across Flanders with intent to seize the north coast of France, were drawing very near the town. In fact, an advance party of the Yorkshires, whilst marking billets for their battalion, collided with a small Uhlan patrol, which beat a hasty retreat.

October 15th.

Setting out to meet the Germans.

The day after arrival at Ypres, the 7th Division set out to meet this oncoming wave of Huns. At the end of the first day's march, the Wiltshires were entrenched astride the Menin Road, about three miles east of Ypres.

Continuing the march next morning, Hooze was reached without event. Here the companies opened out in skirmishing order, so as to clear the woods and close country lying between Hooze and Becelaere.

Before daylight on the 17th, the 21st Brigade continued in column of route along the Menin Road. Reaching a point between Hooze and Becelaere, since known as "Clapham Junction," the column came upon the outskirts of Polygoneveld, a dense wood, and at the same time ran into a thick fog. A deployment was ordered. Yorkshires to the right—Royal Scots Fusiliers in centre—Wiltshires to the left (with 1st South Staffords of 22nd Brigade on their left flank)—Bedfordshires in reserve.

The Wiltshires, proceeding through the wood with their right on the Reutel road, reached the eastern edge and entrenched on a line running north-west from Reutel village. They were in touch with those on their right and left, who also entrenched. The battle order of the Battalion's front from right to left was: "A," "C" and "D" Companies, the right company being astride the Reutel—Becelaere road. "B" Company formed local reserve, and were entrenched in a hollow about 200 yards in rear of the junction between "A" and "C" Companies.

October 17th.

All hands were fully occupied during the afternoon in making a defensive position. A proper reconnaissance of the ground in front could not be satisfactorily carried out until night fell.

Half of "B" Company, under Major Law, formed a detached post at Becelaere and drove back some German cavalry patrols, Lieutenant Fowle securing two of their lances. The post was withdrawn in the evening, and piquets posted in front of the trenches. The first encounter.

During the night Corporal Perry reported that the enemy were massing opposite the right flank, about 400 yards distant. Fire was opened by No. 15 Platoon, and quickly became general, but nothing resulted and the firing ceased.

It was during this that Captain A. C. Magor was killed, to whom fell the honour of being the first of the Battalion to give his life in this great struggle. Death of Capt. Magor.

Work was continued on the improvement of the trenches as soon as it got light again, and obstacles of wire, collected from neighbouring farms, were erected in front.

One platoon, under Lieutenant Ansted, was sent forward to reconnoitre in the direction of Terhand. After passing through Becelaere and sighting a German cavalry patrol, which disappeared as soon as fired on, the platoon continued towards Terhand, and were fired upon when within 250 yards of the village. Here an armoured motor joined them, and the officer in charge of it reported that the Germans had occupied Terhand, and had placed a machine gun in the mill. Finding further advance impracticable, the platoon withdrew to Reutel without a casualty.

The Division continued its advance the next day, and took up a defensive position further to the east. The Wiltshires were allotted a position covering Terhand, on which village they marched with "C" Company as advance guard. The Germans withdrew, and the village was occupied without opposition. This done, the Commanding Officer and Company Commanders rode forward to select a trench line. They at once came under enemy shell fire from the direction of Gheluwe. The position, however, was selected, and the trenches dug under intermittent shrapnel fire, which caused a few casualties. "C" Company remained out in front to cover the operations, and a barricade was erected across the Terhand—Dadizeele road by the Royal Engineers. "D" Company formed the right of the line in touch with the Royal Scots Fusiliers, and "B" Company was on the left in touch with the South Staffordshires. "A" Company was in the

centre with their left on the road. Captain Timmis, their Commander, relates how before it was light the next morning a hostile cavalry patrol rode right on to a barrier he had erected across the road, enfiladed by a section trench twenty yards away. Immediately fire was opened on them the patrol turned about and fled, but to everyone's amazement kept to the road, which was serpentine, and galloped their horses on the hard surface instead of cutting straight across country which was perfectly open.

As soon as the trench-digging was sufficiently developed "C" Company was withdrawn and became local reserve, entrenching west of the village.

A battery of divisional artillery took up a position about 300 yards south of "C" Company, and from time to time replied to the enemy's fire, but was in difficulty because a Red Cross flag could be seen flying from Gheluwe Church. It was learned afterwards that hostile artillery were behind the church. (How slow we were to grasp the real Hun touch!)

October 19th.

The first order
to attack.

That evening orders were received for an attack by the Division, which was to take place the next morning, the object being to secure Menin. The part of the 21st Brigade to attack Dadizeele was carefully explained to the men, but shortly afterwards the order was cancelled. When the morning arrived, however, the 22nd Brigade did commence an attack on Kezelberg, a village south of Dadizeele, on the Menin Road. This was stopped as soon as it became known that a German Army Corps was advancing from Courtrai, and that one of its Divisions had reached Gulleghem. This resulted in a withdrawal of the 7th Division on to its former line, Zandvoorde—Reutel—Zonnebeke.

The Wiltshires were ordered to remain in position and cover the retirement of the Battalions of the 22nd Brigade. They saw the Warwickshires and the Royal Welsh Fusiliers through (the latter much reduced in numbers), also a number of stragglers and wounded, and then moved back to Reutel, the Staffordshires joining in from the north before they reached Becelaere. The Germans followed close on the heels of the Battalion, and there was a good deal of sniping. Reutel was not reached until after dark.

The next day the Divisional Commander ordered

the 20th Brigade to make a reconnaissance in force on Gheluwe. The 21st Brigade was to cover the left of this move, the 2nd Wiltshire Regiment and the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers being detailed with orders to advance on Terhand.

Information from Belgian refugees indicated that Terhand was occupied by about 400 of the enemy, but subsequently it was learned that at the time the village contained at least two full strength German Battalions.

The Wiltshires left their trenches at 10 a.m., and were replaced by the 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment. "C" Company formed the advanced guard, which, after clearing Becelaere of some German cavalry patrols, proceeded astride the Terhand road, followed by "B" on the south of the road, "D" on the north, and "A" in reserve. The Royal Scots Fusiliers were never visible on the march, and touch with them was not established. A weak troop of Northumberland Hussars watched the Battalion's left flank, but no reports were received from them. Two companies of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, the Brigade machine guns and a battery of artillery remained in reserve at Becelaere.

The country was somewhat enclosed, and on approaching Terhand the advanced guard detached a small reconnoitring party. This party advanced about 300 yards to the top of a rise, when they came under heavy fire from German trenches to their front, which killed their leader, Lieutenant E. Spencer. Sergeant Wood was wounded in making a gallant attempt to bring this officer in, but carried on for some time after. This non-commissioned officer afterwards won the D.C.M. whilst serving with the 1st Battalion, but did not survive the war.

October 20th.
Terhand.

The main body of the Battalion was just about to reinforce when orders were received from Divisional Headquarters to withdraw to Reutel. "D" Company, however, had by this time engaged with the enemy, and a good many casualties had occurred. The Second-in-Command, Major Wyndham, went forward to repeat the order to this Company to break off the engagement. But Captain Henslow, the Company Commander, seeing "C" Company withdrawing, decided to remain to cover them. During this withdrawal Sergeant Cheesley did splendid work in carrying a wounded man, Pte. Proudfoot (oddly enough, he had been hit in the foot), back to comparative safety and

assisting another, Private Bridgman, who had been wounded in the knee. The Germans opened heavy shell fire on our men as soon as the withdrawal commenced, but the Battalion kept in good order and casualties were few.

The trenches at Reutel were reached and reoccupied before dark. "D" Company, being the last to come in, was placed in reserve, leaving two platoons with "C," which held the centre of the line. With "C" Company were the two machine guns, under Lieutenant Smith, which hitherto had been brigaded, but had now returned. "A" Company and one platoon of "B" were on the right, and the remainder of "B" was on the left.

No time was lost in improving the trenches as the Huns had followed up the withdrawal very closely. Twice during the night the enemy came on in great numbers in attempts to reach our lines. But years of hard musketry training proved their worth, and each time he was driven off, leaving evidence of what such efforts cost him.

These were the first assaults the Wiltshiremen had stood up against since arriving in the country, and their success added fresh vim to their enthusiasm.

October 21st.

The day which followed was marked by the heavy fire which the Germans poured over from dawn to dusk, and the very weak reply our artillery were able to make owing to lack of equipment. As far as the Wiltshires' trenches were concerned, the enemy's shells were badly placed at first, and had but little effect. But his gunners improved the range hourly.

The Germans made several further attempts in the course of the day to reach our lines. Each time they were driven off and left a trail of dead behind them. They made their biggest efforts against "A" Company, taking advantage of the less open country in this part of the line. But in spite of their bad field of fire and the overwhelming numbers that advanced against them, "A" Company stood their ground. Captain Timmis gives his own short, yet graphic, description of one of these attempts, as follows:—"Presently the shell fire died down on my Company's front, and we saw the Boche grey uniforms with those damnable hats swarming through the wood, about 250 yards to my front, and form up quite calmly in two or perhaps more

lines. I passed along the order to hold our fire until I gave the word. There must have been hundreds formed up in that wood, and more swarming through before they advanced. Then I gave the word, and we let rip. Anyone who has seen a section of infantry knock down falling plates at 500 will realize how far those Boches advanced. They still came out of the wood, and none went back. And then they tried, too, to come out on the north side, where my two right platoons suitably dealt with them. In about twenty minutes it was all over, and what surprised me most was the absence of any covering fire. For although I could see the Boche heads lining their trenches about 500 yards and less to my front, not a bullet came near us. They might have been watching a set piece at Olympia."

Such attacks as these were, of course, preliminaries. But they were sufficient to make it obvious to all that it was only a matter of a few days before the full weight of the German hordes, which had been crossing Belgium with all speed, would be thrown against the thin British lines.

The following message was received from Brigade Headquarters:—

" B.M.

October 21st.

" Orders are to hold present position aaa There must, therefore, be no abandonment of trenches aaa All baggage not actually required for fighting should be sent back in good order, and under a responsible officer of each unit, to Halte, second Kilo, east of Ypres, to report to Administrative Staff Officer, 7th Division, from whom instructions will be received aaa Please send orderly some information as to situation with you."

No telephonic communication had been established with Brigade Headquarters since the Battalion had reoccupied these trenches. The signallers made every effort to restore the connection, but could not keep pace with the shelling, which continually cut the wires. All messages had, therefore, to go by hand; several did not reach their destination, and the runners had to face a hailstorm of shot and shell. These men exhibited great pluck and resource worthy of the highest praise. Colonel Forbes mentions Private Mead in particular.

The position the Battalion occupied was on a

plateau, on the eastern edge of which a belt of trees and some small copses obscured the view to the front; the village of Reutel marked the right flank, restricting the view to the south; to the left the ground rose slightly, rendering everything to the north invisible; and in rear was a number of small houses and the Polygon Wood. Between this wood and the trench line was a deep re-entrant, which drained in a south-westerly direction to the Polygonbeke. The trenches were sited on a north and south line, some 200 to 300 yards from the eastern edge of the plateau. The difficulty of arranging for the defence of the Battalion and maintaining the security of the line can easily be appreciated.

Ammunition and food supplies were in a farm building adjoining the local reserve trenches. Men of "D" Company did some fine work carrying supplies, moving to and fro over some 200 yards of open ground at great personal risk. Conspicuous in this respect were Corporal Busbridge (afterwards won M.M. whilst with the 1st Battalion), Lance-Corporal Hunt, Lance-Corporal Beck, and Privates Perrett, Nash, Penny, Smith, Blunsdon, Berry and Freegard, all of "D" Company. (The last two mentioned were killed whilst engaged on this work.) Also Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Parker and Private Gill, both of "B" Company.

The extreme weakness of our artillery support was deeply felt, especially as the day drew on; for whilst the enemy's fire increased in volume hourly, our own gradually dwindled to nil. A battery had been in position in rear of the right company, but withdrew at dusk. Their commander was wounded. There was no observation post in the vicinity, and therefore no co-operation between the two arms.

A brief lull in the evening was taken advantage of to reinforce "A" Company from the local reserve (two platoons of "D" Company). But it was found that "A" were holding their own, and later the enemy, who was beginning to suffer from his own artillery, withdrew.

In writing his account of the battle, Colonel Forbes praises "A" Company in the following words: "This company was well handled and showed great coolness, shooting straight and inflicting heavy losses on the enemy." Captain Timmis, commanding "A" Company, was awarded

the Military Cross for gallantry. He specially mentions the following:—

Lieutenant Bleckley.

Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Smith.

Sergeant Summers.

Sergeant Wordley.

Corporal P. K. Beck.

Private H. R. Trim.

Private Keen.

Private Rattue.

Private Snook.

Private Noakes.

The two platoons of "D" Company, being no longer required, returned to their positions in local reserve. Dusk fell, and the Wiltshiremen were still firm in their positions. The day had been a hard one, to put it mildly, and the monotonous routine of kill, kill, kill, became nauseating to all. It was astonishing how the closely-packed ranks of the Hun came on, ever on, only to be mown down each time by our fire. The Germans seemed to have a never-ending supply of humanity to throw extravagantly against our hailstorm of shot in thick grey masses.

Among the casualties of the day was Lieutenant Grimston, who had shown great pluck and had been an example to all near him.

A fresh anxiety was created when trouble began with the rifles. Continuous shooting from sunrise to sunset had told on them. Dust and sand, thrown up by bursting shells, had got into their mechanism. Many had jammed, and extractors broke. The only available clearing rod, the property of the Belgian interpreter, was sent up to the firing line, only to be lost in the debris of the shell-swept trenches.

Trouble with
the rifles.

After dark the German artillery shelled the area in rear, severely damaging the road through the wood by which the supplies had to come. As a consequence vehicles could not approach nearer than within three-quarters of a mile, and from that distance everything had to be man-handled.

Information was brought by the Brigade-Major of the 21st Brigade that the 22nd Brigade, which prolonged the line to the left, were about to take up another position further back. This brigade had suffered heavily on the 19th at Kezelberg, and again during the day's fighting at Zonnebeke, and was not strong enough to remain in its present position, which extended from the Wiltshires' left, to and

Left flank
exposed.

including the village of Broodseinde. They were consequently withdrawn to a line one and a half kilometres in rear. This created a difficulty, as it exposed the Battalion's left flank and made it impossible for them to find another position. Further, any withdrawal movement to conform with the 22nd Brigade would have left the Royal Scots Fusiliers' flank unprotected. Colonel Forbes therefore sent the two platoons of "D" Company, from reserve, to entrench themselves in rear of the extreme left and guard that flank. Their trench was cited and dug in the dark, completed by day-break, but showed an uncomfortably short field of fire. This half company, under Captain le Huquet, was now the sole protection to the left flank, and the German gunners commenced to pay particular attention to it. A message was sent to Brigade Headquarters, and, in response, small detachments of Northumberland Hussars and divisional Cyclists were sent to fill the gap.

October 22nd.

The morning of the 22nd showed the Wiltshires in one long, thin line without reserves. But it so happened that the move of Le Huquet's party was a lucky one, for, shortly after, the reserve trenches were completely destroyed by shells.

Our artillery support was still so weak as to be almost nil; whereas the enemy's increased in volume and trenches began to fall in, burying men, rifles and spades.

The odds were against them, but the men, though tired, were elated by their previous day's successes in staving off their attackers. They were determined to stand to the death against the many more assaults they knew would come.

Sure enough, the Huns continued their attacks. Day and night they came on, over and over again. In spite of our slaughtering, they seemed ever to increase in strength; there was no rest. But there was a will, which stood as an impenetrable wall in the Wiltshires' thin line.

The weakness of our artillery emboldened the German gunners, who, at dusk, brought their guns right up to within a few hundred yards of their front line.

During the fighting on the 22nd, a farm about 200 yards to "D" Company's front was giving cover to the enemy and interfering with our field of fire. Corporal Beck and Private Trim (the latter was killed on the 24th) volunteered to go forward

and set alight to it. This they succeeded in doing, notwithstanding the heavy fire opened on them.

In the evening a German sniper, lying "doggo" among the enemy dead in front of "A" Company, caused some inconvenience to "C" Company's right flank. He killed Private Pearce and wounded Lieutenant Shelford, Sergeant Vater and Private Proberts, before he himself was sniped by Private Blake, of "C" Company.

A young drummer named Besford behaved marvellously throughout the day, building up a shell-shattered parapet continuously, without regard to his personal safety, under persistent shell fire.

By the morning of the 23rd the Battalion's trenches had suffered so much from the constant rain of shells that parts had to be abandoned, and many men were lying in the open exposed to machine-gun fire, which, fortunately, was not very accurate. "C" Company's line suffered the most, probably because the Battalion's two machine guns were located there.

Shells were constantly bursting on the machine-gun positions. One gun was hit and the trench blown in, burying two of the gunners. It did not come into action again. The remaining gun carried on for a time, but eventually it was hit by a shell fragment and knocked into the trench, the backsight breaking. This, however, was replaced, and a new position made. But the Germans spotted the earth being thrown up, and a shell, bursting in front, destroyed the new position. Eventually the gun was got into action again, and, though not in good working order, carried on for the remainder of the day.

Machine-gun trouble.

The work of getting forward supplies and ammunition had been rendered much more difficult by the destruction of the old reserve trenches and the adjoining farm. A considerable quantity of stores there had been destroyed. Notwithstanding this, Captain Henslow and his gallant band of men did very fine work, fetching and carrying all they could. They had always to run the gauntlet of fierce shelling, and frequently had to dig one another out.

Nearly all the houses and buildings in the vicinity were burnt or otherwise destroyed, and no more water could be obtained from the wells. The small party of Royal Engineers who had been near Battalion Headquarters were shelled out of their trenches and forced to retire.

Difficulty with the rifles became more acute, and a message was sent to Brigade Headquarters asking for 100 more.

All the while the Germans continued their attacks against our thin front line. Once they succeeded in reaching and occupying some buildings close in front of "A" Company. They were, however, shelled out by their own guns, which set alight to the buildings, and in retreating across the open they were heavily punished by "A's" rifles.

"B" Company suffered very severely from shell fire on the afternoon of the 23rd. Half their trench line was blown in, and some men were suffocated. Major Law ordered No. 5 Platoon (2/Lieutenant Campbell), which had been shelled out to move to a trench on the left, which had been vacated by the 22nd Brigade. At dusk he went to see them, and found only Sergeant Davis and fourteen men left.

By the evening of the 23rd the weakness of the left flank gave Colonel Forbes much anxiety, and he dispatched Captain Henslow, and later Captain and Adjutant Culver, to Brigade Headquarters to explain the situation. Both officers succeeded in accomplishing their errand.

Mysterious
orders to retire.

Mysterious orders had been passed from trench to trench that a retirement was to take place. It was impossible to discover their source, but a lull in the fighting enabled the Commanding Officer to inform each Company that no retirement would take place unless and until the Battalion was relieved, and that such an order, if given, would be in writing. It was suspected that some of the stragglers picked up at Ostend were German agents, and that these false orders emanated from them. It is a fact that some of these men were not seen or heard of afterwards.

A small detachment of the 1st South Staffordshires arrived and reinforced "C" Company, but left again at dusk, after having suffered heavy losses. The men were not required, but their rifles were very welcome. After dark, and as the day (October 23rd) drew to a close, there was a distinct lull in the fighting on the whole of the Battalion front. The men were weary, and their number had been much thinned since the morning. They were tired of ever building up their trenches only to have them blown down again. But in spite of their trials they were still very determined and had not budged an inch. They were much cheered by the information,

which quickly travelled down the line, that they were to be relieved the next day.

Brig.-General Watts visited the Battalion and made a good survey of the situation before returning to his headquarters.

A further reinforcement of three platoons of the 2nd Scots Guards arrived. One went to "A" Company, and the other two to a trench previously held by the South Staffordshires, those on the immediate left being too dilapidated for occupation. Then came 300 men of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. Their commander, Lieut.-Colonel Cadogan, having consulted with Colonel Forbes, it was decided to place the bulk of them as a local reserve, in rear of the right flank, the remainder to entrench in rear of the left flank, which had now become more secure. Unfortunately, they had brought no entrenching tools. Some Royal Engineers, going back, promised to send up their tool cart; but it did not arrive. The Transport Officer, Lieutenant Macnamara, then went back to secure some. About midnight, Colonel Cadogan informed Colonel Forbes that if the tools did not arrive before the fighting recommenced he would be obliged to take his men away. Colonel Forbes agreed that no other course was open. The tools did not arrive, and the Royal Welsh Fusiliers accordingly withdrew. Lieutenant Macnamara, when attempting to return to the trenches with a party of Wiltshires who had been blown out of their trenches, received a bullet wound in the chest.

As soon as it got light the next morning the Germans resumed their bombardment. It was again accurate and overwhelming, and in a very short time our trenches were destroyed. In addition, our power of resistance was further weakened by increased trouble with the rifles.

Heavy fighting was going on south of the village of Reutel. Two of the Wiltshires' platoons, one of "A" Company under 2/Lieutenant Rogers and one of "B" Company under 2/Lieutenant Fowle, were entrenched on the southern edge of that village. About 200 yards to their right was a company of Royal Scots Fusiliers. Again to the right of this company was a thickly-planted wood, which separated them from the remainder of their battalion. The Germans now made a strong attack on this company, and succeeded in capturing their position by 6 a.m. This was entirely unknown to

October 24th.
The Germans
break into the
Wiltshires' line.

the remainder of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, and was known only to the two Wiltshire platoons just mentioned. Against these two platoons the Huns now hurled themselves. In the meantime heavy fighting became general all along the front. The two platoons made a strong resistance. 2/Lieutenant Fowle was badly wounded, and, whilst being taken back, he and 2/Lieutenant Campbell were killed by the same shell. The other platoon commander, 2/Lieutenant Rogers, with the remainder of the party, after a hand-to-hand fight which reduced them to very small numbers, was at length driven from his position to the wood in rear and on the southern side of the village. He was still unable to inform the rest of the Battalion, who, busy with their own front, were in complete ignorance of the actual state of affairs.

The Germans then occupied Reutel and mounted machine guns in the houses. The Wiltshires' trenches afforded very scanty cover, and bullets came from flank and rear, but they continued to hold their front until 8 a.m.

The Huns massed in strength in the village and in the re-entrant in rear. This they had no difficulty in doing unobserved. Then, in overwhelming numbers, they emerged. Many of our men were shot from the rear, and companies, being fully engaged with the enemy in front, did not know what might be happening to their neighbours. "A" Company was overwhelmed before "C" Company was aware of it. In these conditions a bayonet charge was impossible. Nor could fire be brought to bear on the masses of Bosche approaching from right flank and rear. The two platoons of "D" Company, echeloned on the left rear, had their view restricted by the houses behind them and knew nothing of the developments on the right.

The trenches were thus captured, bit by bit, from right to left, the Germans protecting themselves from their own artillery fire by displaying coloured screens.

The Commanding Officer, with his Senior Major and Adjutant, proceeded in the direction of "A" Company, but was surrounded by Germans and captured. In the latter part of his story of the battle he writes as follows:—

"On being taken through the German lines, we were able to see something of the havoc wrought in his ranks by our fire. His trenches were filled with

Colonel Forbes' description after capture.

dead, and corpses were stacked in heaps in the copses. Also we were able to estimate the strength of the German infantry which had been opposed to us. The latter consisted of two regiments (six battalions) of the Wurtemberg Army and the 57th Jaeger Battalion. There were men wearing the numbers 243, 244, 246 and 247. The fact that two complete regiments made the final assault was communicated to Colonel Forbes by the German general in immediate command, who courteously congratulated the Commanding Officer on our resistance. The 7th Division possessed no howitzer batteries, and this deficiency was severely felt. There was no aeroplane observation and there were no anti-aircraft guns. On the other hand, the Germans appeared to lack none of these things. They had an artillery observation post in their front infantry line, and seemed to be able to place each shell precisely where it was wanted. One of their staff officers afterwards informed us that our guns had never 'found' theirs. In the area occupied by us there was little ground left untouched by their high explosive shells. All houses, farms and ricks in the neighbourhood were ruined or destroyed. The unmetalled road running west through the Polygon Wood was, for some distance, cut up by shells, and on the last two days enemy snipers were in the wood itself. This made the matter of supplies and ammunition, as well as the carrying back of the wounded, difficult. Simultaneously with the German enveloping attack on the right, an attack was developing on the left. Owing to the configuration of the ground this attack was unseen by us. But, after being captured, Captain Moore saw the enemy advancing on that flank in several lines. After taking our position, the enemy appears to have made no effort to go forward into the Polygon Wood. He made strenuous and unsuccessful efforts to obtain from us information as to what reserves might be behind us. The intensity of our fire and his own heavy losses had thoroughly deceived him. As far as we were aware, there were no British forces between us and Ypres."

On October 5th the 2nd Wiltshire Regiment left England 1,100 strong. On the morning of October 24th they numbered 450. This, with the exception of a few men back with the transport and stores, shows the losses sustained by the Battalion during their first three weeks of fighting. Those in rear,

who escaped capture, were about 70 with the transport lines and about 80 who were on their way up to the firing line when Lieutenant Macnamara was wounded, and who never arrived.

The officers who gave their lives in the battle were:—

Captain A. C. Magor.

Captain C. G. M. Carter.

Lieutenant E. Spencer.

Lieutenant H. S. Grimston.

2/Lieutenant M. R. Fowle.

2/Lieutenant E. H. A. H. Burges.

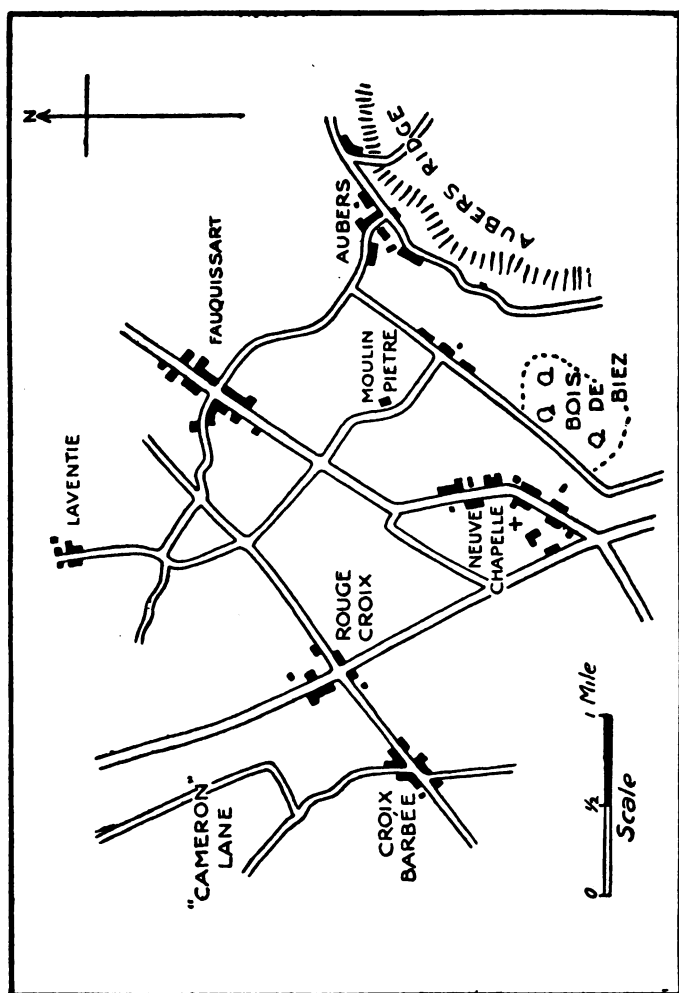
2/Lieutenant W. P. Campbell.

It was deplorable that in this, the first Battle of Ypres, the fighting career of such a keen, well-trained, fine body of men, intent on seeing the thing through, should be cut short so early in the greatest of all wars.

The 99th, like the other battalions in the Division, had been sacrificed to save the situation. They stood their ground in a long thin line (the Division's front was five miles and that of the Wiltshires 1,000 yards) and staved off the enemy until more troops could be brought to the spot.

Their marvellously rapid fire served to camouflage their real weakness in numbers. The Germans were astounded when, later, they learned the actual number of troops that had been opposing them.

It was a fierce conflict between quantity and quality, in which the latter, though many were killed or captured, really gained the day; for it cannot be denied that the Germans lost the war when they failed to break the British line in the First Battle of Ypres.



Wilt. R.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST WINTER AND THE BATTLE OF NEUVE CHAPELLE.

WHAT remained of the 2nd Wiltshire Regiment now rallied at the Battalion's transport lines, which were situated at Kruiskalsijde, a small hamlet near Ypres.

Lieutenant and Quartermaster S. Hewitt would have been the only officer left had not Sergeant-Major Waylen been commissioned in the field during the battle. The latter now took command, and in the few days that followed set to work to reorganize and make the best force he could out of his little band of men.

Salvaging the Battalion after the disaster.

It was no easy task, for the whole time they were chased from place to place trying to avoid the enemy's far-reaching shell fire, which caused them more casualties. In each fresh position they had to bivouac, and pitching and striking camp took up most of the time.

Men who had lost their way, and men who had become mixed up with other regiments in the fight, rejoined daily, and the total strength, including those with the transport and stores, reached about 250. The fighting part of these 2/Lieutenant Waylen organized into three platoons.

On the evening of November 3rd they were ordered up to the line once more to support a battalion of the Loyal North Lancashires. They remained forward some twenty-four hours, when, after suffering more casualties, they were withdrawn to the reserve.

The following night the remains of the 21st Brigade were ordered to withdraw and assemble at "White Château," a point just south-west of Ypres. Thither Waylen took his three platoons, and, on meeting the other battalions, found them in much the same reduced condition as his own.

At daybreak on the 6th the proud but weary 7th Division moved away from this scene of struggle. They marched through Ypres and Locre,

and, on reaching Bailleul, they went into billets, which then seemed to them absolute luxury.

There were two diversions for the Wiltshires *en route*. They passed the 1st Battalion, which was on its way to the battle, and many were the greetings exchanged. Then they were met by a draft of 96 non-commissioned officers and men. This was brought along from the base by Lieutenant P. S. L. Beaver, who had recovered from a wound received while with the 1st Battalion on the Aisne.

Lieut. Beaver
takes command.

Finding himself senior officer, Beaver took over the command from Waylen, and the Battalion continued towards Bailleul.

November 8th
to 12th. In
support at
Ploegsteert.

On arrival the Wiltshires were put up in large glass-houses known as the Graperies, in the Rue de la Gare. But they were not left alone there very long. From the 8th to the 12th they were sent eastwards a distance of nine kilometres to Ploegsteert, to support the 4th Division.

They did not become involved in any fighting, but had once more to sit under a heavy rain of shell fire, which caused some casualties, though luckily but few.

At Bailleul.

Returning to the same billets at Bailleul, they found a small draft awaiting them. With the new men, Beaver was now able to organize his Battalion into two companies. The next few days in Bailleul were quiet, and afforded good opportunity for this, and also for continuing the re-equipping and cleaning up.

Reorganizing as
a two-company
battalion.

The shortage of officers was deeply felt throughout the Division, and to meet the urgency of the case fifty men were drawn from the ranks of the 28th London Regiment (Artists Rifles) a Territorial battalion which had arrived in Bailleul about the same time as the 7th Division. Four of these—A. J. Kitcat, F. M. Strawson, R. H. Carden, and W. S. Shepherd—were sent to the Wiltshires. Equipped as full privates, they reported on the 13th to Lieutenant Beaver for duty as second-lieutenants. The only thing which distinguished them from the men they were to lead was the Territorial Long Service Star, which they borrowed from their friends in the "Artists" and fixed to their shoulders as the denoting "pip" of the second-lieutenant.

The time now arrived for the 7th Division once again to take its place in the line. A move was made on the 14th, with the intention of again reinforcing the 4th Division. The order, however, was

cancelled, and after marching seven kilometres out of Bailleul the Division returned to the billets they had left.

The order was soon substituted by another, to take over the line in the Fleurbaix sector, to which the Division marched in stages.

Leaving Bailleul, the Wiltshires, after halting for a night at Saily-sur-la-Lys, arrived in the line on November 17th.

November 17th.
March to Fleur-
baix Sector.

The general situation then amounted to a deadlock. The Germans had failed to achieve any decisive victory, and winter was making the ground impossible for a further big offensive. Heavy rain set in, and, falling on such flat ground, undermined the defences of both sides. British, French and Germans all set to work to grapple with their common enemy, the winter, and very soon two unbroken lines of trenches appeared, stretching from the sea to Switzerland. They opposed each other at distances varying from six hundred yards in some places to bomb-throwing distance (fifty yards) in others.

The part of the line the 7th Division now took over ran just south-east of La Boutillerie, the 21st Brigade taking the centre, which was exactly in front of that hamlet. The 20th Brigade went in on the right of the divisional front, and the 22nd Brigade on the left. Each brigade put two battalions in the line to hold their respective frontages, the other two being kept in rear in reserve billets.

Of the 21st Brigade, the 2nd Wiltshires and 2nd Bedfordshires were the first to take over the front line, the former going in on the left and the latter on the right. The 2nd Yorkshires and Royal Scots Fusiliers remained in rear, one in brigade reserve and the other in divisional reserve.

The relief on the night of November 17th, when the Wiltshires first took over this bit of the line, was filled with difficulties. The night was a particularly dark one, and the country was new to everyone. There were no communication trenches or pathways, the only guide to the line being a very narrow and wet ditch lined with pollards. Along this ditch the Battalion approached the front line in single file. Their progress was slow and much disturbed by occasional sharp bursts of rapid fire, which swept over the flat ground. When only within a few yards of the actual front this ditch ran

Difficulties of
winter trench
warfare.

into a large sunken space, deep enough to afford cover from snipers. Its convenience was taken full advantage of later, when used as trench store, ration dump, meeting place for guides on relief nights, etc. Some of the first "ration dump" rumours must have been hatched at this spot, and on relief nights it was as busy as a London railway terminus. It was named "Charing Cross," and continued to be much in evidence until, being also a junction of many ditches, the rains rushed in one day and swamped it, burying a large number of picks and shovels.

Once in position, the 7th Division, which was destined to remain in this part of the line for many weeks, settled down for the winter. Each brigade found its own reliefs. The Wiltshires' sub-sector was the left half of the Brigade front, and this they took in turns with the Royal Scots Fusiliers to hold. Each battalion had a three or four days' tour, and then, after relief by the other, marched back to either Fleurbaix or Bac St. Maur for an equal period of rest. All these inter-battalion reliefs were made across the open after dark. The ground was very low lying, and the extremely heavy rains that fell that winter made the going across these sodden fields very hard.

The trenches were of the most primitive kind. In fact, when the Wiltshires first took over their part the defence consisted of a single badly-dug trench, sited on a natural ditch which received most of the water for some distance around. The work on the sector was so urgent that the Battalion armed itself with picks and shovels before going in on the first night, and almost before they first saw daylight in their new position they had commenced to dig a new trench away from the ditch. Hard work, improving the defences both front and rear, was carried on throughout the winter.

The routine of this winter trench warfare went steadily on in its monotonous way, and there are but few things to record which disturbed its regularity. During their periods in billets in rear of the line the battalions did as much work as when in front, and sometimes more. Drafts of both officers and men arrived at fairly steady intervals during the first part of the winter, and each battalion got to respectable strength again. 2/Lieutenants P. P. Legg, H. B. Ransom, H. M. Hunter, and D. M. Jeans arrived with 151 men a few days after the

Division had taken over the line, and were soon followed by Major Wilson (attached from King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry), Captains W. G. Hoare (attached from Durham Light Infantry), C. H. Rowe (attached from York and Lancaster Regiment), and B. Cave-Brown-Cave, 2/Lieutenants W. T. Sargeant, C. A. Brooks, and E. L. Francis. A little later Captain E. L. Makin arrived and took over the command from Captain Beaver.

Capt. Makin
takes command

There was a short interval from the Fleurbaix sector when, on December 13th, the 21st Brigade was relieved and marched at once to Pont de Nieppe, just west of Armentières, where they remained for four days only, to strengthen the reserve of the IV Corps.

A few days near
Armentières.

On returning to the Fleurbaix sector, via Bac St. Maur, the Wiltshires were joined by another draft consisting of 2/Lieutenants W. B. P. Spencer, S. J. Belsham (attached from Middlesex Regiment), and 150 non-commissioned officers and men. This now brought the strength of the Battalion to 17 officers and 780 other ranks.

The afternoon of that same day, December 18th, the 2nd Wiltshires were ordered to march at once to Fleurbaix, to be in support to an attack the 7th Division was to make that night, individually, from its own sector.

December 18th.
A local night
attack.

The preliminary bombardment was in progress as the Wiltshires marched into the village. Carried out by the divisional field guns only, it was very weak. One of the Fleurbaix farmhouses was burning with great fury, and in order to reach their allotted position the Wiltshires had to pass between this blaze and the German line. Their column must have been most clearly silhouetted to the enemy's view, but luckily nothing resulted.

The attack, in which the 22nd Brigade suffered severely, failed to achieve any success, and the Wiltshires were not called upon.

The Christmas of 1914 was rather unique for such a war, and is specially worthy of description.

The first
Christmas.

On Christmas Eve it was the Battalion's turn to go into the line. The relief of the Royal Scots Fusiliers went smoothly, and was much the same as others had been. But, as the night wore on, those on duty in the forward trenches were surprised to see that the Germans were fixing lighted Christmas trees at intervals along their parapet. This was

followed by the distinct sound of carols which was wafted across from the enemy's lines. Their singing in harmony was remarkably good, although when it was clear enough to detect the guttural it was very distasteful to the Britisher. In fact, so much so, that some of our men amused themselves by seeing how many candles they could shoot off the Christmas trees. At dawn there was a thick mist which totally obscured the German lines. Men were able to move about on top quite freely without fear of being spotted. As a result, as soon as "stand to" was over, quite a number of men were out in front, throwing up earth on to the parapet, which was badly in need of attention owing to the severe weather. About eight o'clock the fog suddenly lifted. So suddenly, in fact, that many men were still digging after they had come within full view of the enemy. The Germans, however, were equally surprised. For when our men looked round and discovered they were so exposed, they could clearly see Bosches doing much the same work to their own trenches, and apparently unconcerned as to the fog having lifted. It was an extraordinary position, and one might have expected the next move to be a mad rush by both sides for their respective trenches and some wild shooting at the last men in. But there was Christmas spirit in the air, and in those early days of the war there was a little more of the sporting element about the whole thing. British and Germans, a few at a time, unarmed, moved across No Man's Land towards each other. In a very short time an unofficial truce established itself, and No Man's Land became a sort of promenade. Cigarettes and souvenirs were exchanged, and a few of the Germans, who proved to be Saxons, could speak English. They were very free in expressing their hate of the Prussians. A good many of our dead had remained in the open since December 18th, and, as the truce made it possible, most of the day was spent in giving these a decent burial.

There was not much more moving about in the open after Christmas Day, but there was no firing or hostility of either side until New Year's Eve. On that evening firing started somewhere and was taken up all along the line. In this abrupt way the truce came to an end.

During Christmas the command was taken over by Major F. D. Finlay, who joined the Battalion on

December 21st. But on the 27th this officer was sent down to hospital, and the command was resumed by Captain Makin.

1915.

The steady rains which had been the feature of the first part of the winter continued with even greater severity in the New Year. The trenches became so flooded that about the middle of February it was necessary to withdraw practically all but the actual outpost line from their positions, and put them in the cellars of some shell-torn buildings situated just in rear of the line. As No Man's Land was almost an impassable swamp, an attack from the Germans was not to be feared, and the health of the men was therefore of the first importance. As time went on the arrangements for general cleaning up and recreation in the rest areas steadily improved. But even better than this, and much to everyone's rejoicing, the granting of leave to England was started for all ranks, in rotation according to the length of time spent in France. To some it was a long and weary wait before their turn came, but it was something definitely to be looked forward to.

Incessant rain.

Leave to England started.

At the beginning of March, 1915, the first division of the Canadian Expeditionary Force to take their place in the line in France arrived in the area to relieve the 7th Division. The Wiltshires were relieved by the 8th Battalion of Canadians on March 2nd. They were not sorry to leave the Fleurbaix sector, where they had spent a very dull and wet winter. They marched into Estaires, a little village close to Sailly-sur-la-Lys, and went into billets that were just a little more comfortable than those they had been used to during the past months.

Relieved by Canadians.

At Estaires they were at once drawn into preparations that were being made for an early attack. Drafts were arriving to bring the Division up to strength, and the Wiltshires, in addition to small numbers that had arrived during January and February, were, on March 9th, the eve of the attack, joined by 6 officers and 83 other ranks. This brought the Battalion up to a strength of 28 officers and 886 other ranks. The officers who had arrived with these drafts since the beginning of the year were Lieutenants S. R. Jeans, E. T. L. McQueen, and 2/Lieutenants Ruddel Brown, J. C. Spencer, V. R. W. Morrison, and F. H. Elwin. On March 9th also arrived Captain R. M. T. Gillson, who,

being senior to Captain Makin, took over the command of the Battalion.

Preparations were now complete for the attack which took place the following day opposite the village of Neuve Chapelle, which at that time was in the hands of the Germans. The Neuve Chapelle sector was just south of the sector the Battalion had occupied during the winter.

March 10th.
Neuve Chapelle
attack opens.

At 2.30 a.m. on March 10th the Wiltshires paraded at the cross roads known as Nouveau Mond and marched to Cameron Lane, a point two miles north-west of Neuve Chapelle, which they reached at 5.30 a.m. They at once occupied trenches which were allotted them in rear of the 2nd Gordons. This was the first assembly position.

At 7.30 our artillery, stronger than ever before and perfectly timed, opened a splendidly fierce bombardment which they kept up without weakening for half an hour. This played on the Germans' front and rear defences and made a grand opening for the first big attack the British were about to make since they entered the war. The Wiltshires were not engaged in the first assault. But at 1 p.m. they received orders to advance.

Leaving Cameron Lane, the companies moved forward in lines of sections at twenty-five yards interval. "D" Company was in front, followed by "C," "A," and "B" respectively. About an hour and a half later, having reached some support trenches facing Neuve Chapelle (now in the hands of the British) the companies re-formed. They had by this time come under the enemy's shell fire, but it was not heavy.

"D" and "C" Companies now moved forward to the old British front line, from which, earlier in the morning, the attack had been launched. Up to this time the Battalion had been in reserve to the attackers. Orders were now given for them to move out on to the left of the 2nd Yorkshires, who were attacking Moulin du Pietre (north-east of Neuve Chapelle). They were to clear any trenches still found to be occupied by the enemy, and to fill the gap between the Yorkshires' left and the old British front line. To accomplish this, Captain Gillson sent "D" and "C" Companies to some captured German trenches 250 yards south of a farm known as Moated Grange. Some delay took place, and Captain Gillson, going to find the cause, was

Capt. Gillson
wounded.

wounded in the leg, and, being unable to move, handed over the command again to Captain Makin. Capt. Makin resumes command.

Fighting as they were, on the extreme left of the attacking front, it was the Battalion's duty to work its way up the German line northwards, clearing it of the enemy, widening the front of attack and at the same time keeping in touch with the old British front line. No advance was to be made without orders from the Brigade Commander, and it was some time before these reached Captain Makin. However, as soon as they were received, "C" Company pushed forward by platoons along the German line, supported by "D" Company, whilst a bombing party worked inside the trench. "A" and "B" Companies followed close in rear. This advance was at first very successful. The companies moved forward well, and took 1 officer and 107 enemy prisoners.

Wiltshires advance and take prisoners

The leading company, reaching a point about fifty yards north-east of Moated Grange, came up against a wide wet ditch and at the same time came under heavy rifle fire from the Germans. They overcame this, however, and continued, though with much slower progress, until, after about another 100 yards of enemy trench had been taken, dusk came on and further advance that day was impossible. A halt was also necessary as there was a gap between the Battalion and the Yorkshires on the right.

Among the casualties suffered in this last move were Captain Hoare and Lieutenant Spencer, both killed.

The companies consolidated their positions, and a headquarters was established in an old German trench about 150 yards south-east of Moated Grange.

During the night Captain Makin moved "A" Company up on the left of his line in order to connect with the old British front line. The position of companies then was: "A" on the left, "D" centre, and "C" on the right in touch with the Yorkshires. "B" was slightly in rear, in reserve. Although "dug in," there was no cover from observation, and their positions soon became known to the Germans. As a result, a great many casualties were sustained from the continuous and heavy shell fire, which was rained on them that night and with still more severity and greater accuracy during the following day.

There was no further advance in the Wiltshires' part of the line on March 11th. But hard digging work was necessary from morning till night to try to protect themselves and lessen their casualties. On this day the Battalion was put to the greatest test since leaving Ypres in the previous October. It was the most colossal task for officers to organize their men in their digging in face of such fierce and incessant shell fire and in such an exposed position. It was, in fact, found impossible to make thorough defensive positions in daylight. But when it got dark more difficulties cropped up, in the way of depleted ranks. In addition to the thinning out caused by the casualties, men had to be sent long distances for rations and officers were called upon to supply parties for work elsewhere. It was arranged in this way. A party of fifty was sent to assist the 2nd Gordons, and a similar party to the Yorkshires. Half "B" Company were detailed to erect a wire entanglement along the Battalion front, and the other half were sent for rations. The remainder of the Battalion was concentrated on those parts of the front which most urgently needed attention.

March 12th.

A counter-attack.

At 5.30 a.m., just at the moment when "B" Company's party had returned with the rations, the Germans put in a bombing attack on the Wiltshires' front. Their object seemed to be to push along their old and recently captured front line. "D" Company eventually checked their progress, but not until "C" Company had been compelled to make a slight withdrawal and "A" had been forced back into the old British front line. In the first part of the disturbance the position of things was very obscure, and "A" Company could not be located for some time. "C" Company and the bombers of the Yorkshire Regiment made an immediate counter-attack, which got ahead and for the moment looked like putting everything right. But, unfortunately, they were driven back by heavy machine-gun fire. The leader of this very fine attempt, Lieutenant Morrison, was killed.

Lost ground successfully re-taken, with prisoners.

Captain Makin now organized an attack by one and a half platoons of "B" Company, assisted by some bombers of the Grenadier Guards. This was very successful. In addition to retaking all the lost ground, 350 prisoners were secured. "A" Company, which had by that time got into touch with Headquarters, and the remainder of "B," were moved up to strengthen the holding of the regained line.

One of the misfortunes of that eventful day was that the rations fetched up by "B" Company the night before could not be issued.

Night fell again, and although the line was strongly held, the Wiltshires, Gordons and Grenadier Guards were very mixed up. The difficulty of relieving any one particular unit can be understood. The Warwickshires were ordered to relieve the Wiltshires, but, to add to the complications, they could not arrive until just as it was getting light. "D" Company was the only one properly relieved. The remaining companies were compelled to remain in the line for the rest of the following day until it got dark again. As a result many more casualties were suffered from the enemy's shell fire, which continued all day as before. The three companies, however, finally got away, and the Battalion was assembled once more at Cameron Lane.

Wiltshires
relieved under
difficulties.

During these operations Private Wakeman was cut off for thirty-six hours, but contrived to slip through the German lines and rejoin the Battalion.

By daybreak on the 14th Captain Makin was able to satisfy himself that all survivors of the battle were present. He then moved his Battalion slowly back to three farms about half a mile from Cameron Lane. The men were hardly able to keep awake as they moved along the road, and dropped into their places in the barns as soon as they arrived.

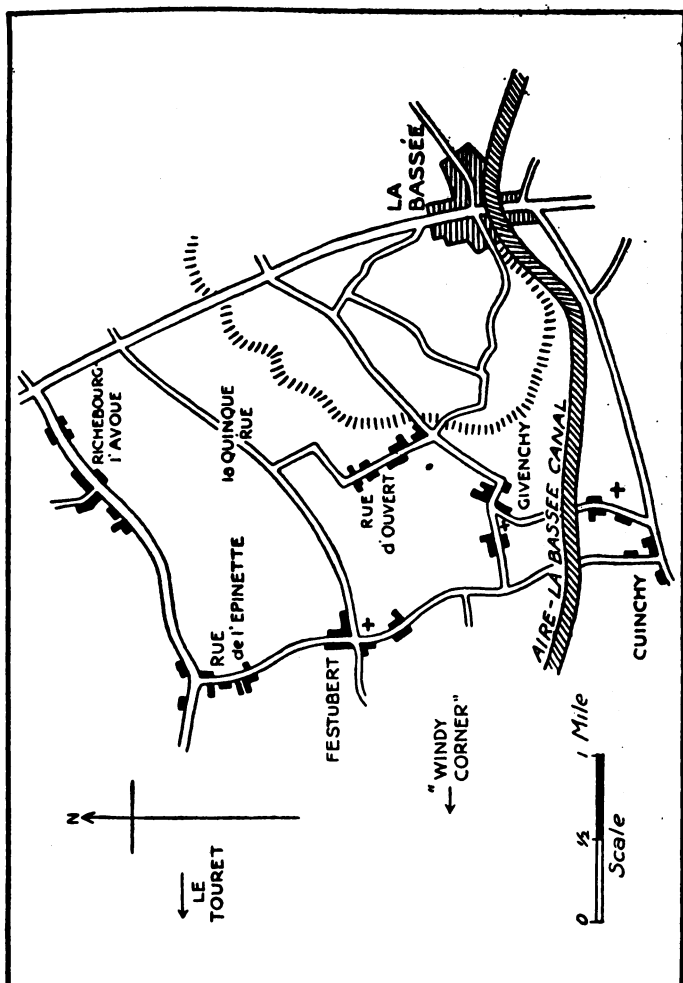
March 14th.
Out of the battle.

The 7th Division, once more out of the fight to rest, now concentrated at Estaires. To this village the Wiltshires marched on March 15th.

The total casualties of the Battalion in the Battle of Neuve Chapelle were as follows:—Killed, Captain W. G. Hoare, 2/Lieutenants W. P. B. Spencer, R. H. Carden, F. H. Elwin, P. G. Ferguson, D. R. Morrison and 58 other ranks; died of wounds, 2/Lieutenant V. R. W. Johnson; wounded, 11 officers and 162 other ranks; missing, 56 other ranks.

Besides these losses, two officers and a number of men fell sick as a result of the strain.

Major-Gen. T. Capper, then commanding the 7th Division, sent the following letter to Captain Makin: "The Divisional General has received the reports of the fighting near Neuve Chapelle between the 10th and 14th of March. He commends the conduct of the 2nd Battalion Wiltshire Regiment in the stubborn fighting in difficult trench country, and much deplores the losses sustained by this Battalion."



W.I.T.R.

CHAPTER III.

THE BATTLES OF FESTUBERT AND GIVENCHY.

At Estaires the 7th Division had a few days well-earned rest. With this and reorganization the Battalion soon brightened into fitness once again.

Captain Beaver was sent to hospital, and his place as Adjutant was taken by Captain J. M. Ponsford, who rejoined from the Divisional Cyclist Company, to which he had been attached since the Division landed.

Second-Lieutenants A. J. Samut, F. H. Friend, and F. H. Bone, commissioned from the Territorials, followed a few days later by 2/Lieutenants F. A. Bennett and J. M. Bales from England, joined and strengthened the roll of officers.

After five days' rest, the Division was given a place in the line east of Laventie. The 20th Brigade did a "tour" first, and the 21st Brigade had orders to relieve them on March 25th. On that day the Wiltshires, having been allotted front line trenches, marched direct from Estaires and relieved the 2nd Gordons in the Picantin sector.

This position was about three miles north of that which the Battalion held in the recent battle. The Wiltshires held the line for four days only, when the Brigade's front was reorganized. Occupied at first by three battalions, it was now taken over by the Yorkshires and Bedfordshires, the Wiltshires and the Royal Scots Fusiliers withdrawing to reserve billets close in rear.

Although such a short time in the line, the Battalion had some casualties. 2/Lieutenant V. R. W. Johnson and two men were killed and four wounded. Most of these were caused by snipers.

On the last day of the month the 20th Brigade returned to take its turn in the line again, and the 21st retired to billets at La Gorgue. More officers joined from England, this time bringing with them a useful draft of 90 non-commissioned officers and men. The officers were: Captains D. Manners

The Picantin
Sector.

Davies and G. P. Lewis, Lieutenant F. C. Whiting, and 2/Lieutenants H. D. I. D. Brown, H. M. Yeatman, and J. G. G. Janasz (the latter attached from the 3rd Dorsetshire Regiment). Also, a little later, Lieutenant T. E. Alexander and 2/Lieutenants F. N. Verran and G. Bryer Ash.

Lieut.-Colonel
Brown takes
command.

Lieut.-Colonel W. S. Brown arrived from England on April 1st, and took over command of the Battalion from Captain Makin.

During this rest, the Commander-in-Chief, Sir John French, came to the area and inspected the 21st Brigade, which was paraded for the purpose in an open space at Estaires. He complimented the Brigade on its smartness, and congratulated officers, non-commissioned officers and men on the manner in which they had fought in the Battles of Ypres and Neuve Chapelle.

From April 14th to the 21st, the 21st Brigade took its turn in the line at the Picantin sector again. They shared the responsibility of the Brigade front with the Royal Scots Fusiliers during the first half of that time, and during the other half were in support, occupying buildings at Fort d'Esquin, south of Laventie.

Trench mortars.

At this time both sides were experimenting in the use of trench mortars. They took all sorts of weird forms, and, their range being short, they were tried in those parts of the line where No Man's Land was narrowest. Picantin was one of the suitable points (the opposing lines were only 100 yards apart in one place), and in this tour the Wiltshires were subjected to a good dose, the Germans seeming to have a specially big batch to test. The casualties, however, were few.

The tour was otherwise more or less uneventful, and when the Brigade was relieved the Wiltshires moved back into rest billets in the Rue de Paradis, west of Laventie. Their stay there, however, was short, and they were moved on to reoccupy the billets at La Gorgue.

Capt. Makin
resumes
command.

A slight epidemic of measles spread round the Brigade, and the Commanding Officer, Lieut.-Colonel W. S. Brown, was among those who "went down" with it. The Battalion, therefore, once again came under the command of Captain Makin.

At La Gorgue news of the first use of gas by the Germans at Ypres came through. The use of gas in battle staggered the men in France as much as

it did the people at home, and there were many conjectures as to what form it took and how it was used. That it was effective they had no doubt, for each communiqué, as it came through, showed how the Germans were gaining ground.

With the exception of attacks round Givenchy, which they made against the Indian troops in December and January, this was the first sign of offensive the Hun had shown since his attacks on the same sector in October. The British line, as a whole, was still thinly held. Many new battalions were being quickly formed in England, but as yet were not ready to take their place in the line. Thus available reserves all along the line were always liable to be called upon.

The Wiltshires got their orders to "stand to" just as they were settling in La Gorgue on the 27th, and almost simultaneously with the news of the attack.

All night everything was kept in readiness, and at midday the next day the Brigade moved off, marching to Strazeele, a village lying nine miles north-west of Estaires. Although the march was not a long one, the day was warm, and long tours of duty in wet trenches, together with insufficient exercise of the right sort, had its effect on many feet. But a further march the next day, which was expected, was not ordered. Instead, the Brigade remained in the Strazeele area for six days, and was not called upon to help in the Second Battle of Ypres.

April 28th.
Going north as
reserve to Ypres
defenders.

The march, however, had served to show up the effect of trench warfare, and while at Strazeele the feet were hardened by daily practice route marches.

At Strazeele the arrival of another draft further strengthened the ranks of the Battalion. This was brought by Sergeant-Major A. J. Hill, who took over the duties of Regimental Sergeant-Major from Sergeant-Major Smith, the latter becoming Sergeant-Major of "D" Company.

The Brigade now returned to the Picantin sector, and, on arrival, after one night in Estaires, the Wiltshires relieved the 1st Londons (T.F.) in the position they had held previously. Nothing of special note occurred, and after a quiet tour they were relieved by the 1/4th Cameron Highlanders, a battalion which had recently joined the Brigade, and withdrew to support trenches in rear. On the day of this relief, May 8th, the Wiltshires were informed that they must be in readiness to follow

May 5th.
Back to Picantin.

up an attack which would be made by the 8th Division on the following morning. The 8th Division was on the right of the 7th, and the objective of the attack was the same as in the recent battles, namely, to secure Aubers Ridge, the commanding ground held by the Germans.

Attack by 8th
Division.

The morning arrived and the attack was launched. But the 8th Division, having suffered very badly, made but little progress. The scheme was abandoned and the Battalion was not called upon.

The spirit of the offensive, however, was kept up, and, almost immediately following upon this, attention was directed to the Festubert sector, the other side of Neuve Chapelle, about six miles from Laventie. Here preparations for an attack were already in progress. With a view to taking part in them, the Wiltshires marched, on the night of the 10th, to Le Touret, a cluster of buildings about four miles west of Festubert village.

May 10th.

For the next three days the companies were fully occupied taking their part in the preparations. Day and night large working parties moved between Le Touret and Festubert, their principal work being the digging of assembly trenches. The weather had cleared. It was quite hot, and this was lucky, as, owing to the lack of existing cover at Le Touret, the majority of the Battalion had to bivouac.

On the afternoon before the attack was to commence, the 2nd Wiltshires, now about 22 officers and 900 other ranks strong, began to move towards their battle positions. As the 21st Brigade was to be in reserve at the start these were not in the front line, but on the outskirts of Festubert. "A" and "B" Companies went first, in daylight, and were followed soon after dark by the remainder of the Battalion. They took up a position on the east side of the Rue de l'Épinette, a narrow road which linked Festubert with the Rue du Bois. They settled themselves in and around a defensive works known as "Orchard Redoubt" well before the last hours of the day.

May 16th.

Battle of Festu-
bert opens.

The initial attack was opened by the 2nd Division going "over the top" at midnight that night. At 3.15 a.m. the 7th Division joined in, with the 22nd Brigade on the right and the 20th Brigade on the left, pushing out towards Rue d'Ouvvert. The Machine Gun Section of the Battalion, under Lieutenant A. Samut, which had been lent to the

20th Brigade during the preliminary bombardment, covered the left flank of the attack. Two of the guns fired 5,000 rounds apiece, and on two or three occasions had the satisfaction of firing on small parties of the enemy as they retired. Later in the day one of these guns was put out of action by a German sniper.

The 21st Brigade remained in reserve at Rue de l'Epinette, which came under the enemy's heavy shell fire as soon as the attack commenced. But although this continued with equal severity throughout the day, the Wiltshires were lucky in suffering no casualties from it.

The operations on that day, which was a Sunday, progressed fairly successfully, and the Wiltshires, as a battalion, did not move from their position. The Division gained some ground and a number of prisoners were taken. But during the day Captain Makin was ordered to send one company to accompany the Brigade bombers to go forward and clear a certain trench, which, according to the reports that came back, was occupied by Germans and giving trouble. "B" Company, under Captain Manners Davies, was detailed, and, leaving Rue de l'Epinette at 1 p.m., soon arrived on the spot. By that time, however, the trench in question had been evacuated by the enemy, with the exception of some of their wounded. But there was difficulty in entering the trench in daylight, as the position was very exposed, and the company had some casualties from snipers and shell fire. Having occupied the trench, they proceeded to establish "blocks" in all trenches which led to the enemy, and also on the extreme right flank of their own trench, which was exposed. These blocks were made by filling in the trench at two points, generally with filled sandbags or just earth, but sometimes with a tangled mass of barbed wire, whichever was most available. Behind each point nearest to the trench held, two or three bombers were posted, and this guarded against the enemy approaching the trench under cover of any disused communication trench, and also against his bombers getting within bomb-throwing distance.

"B" Company held their position until the evening of that day, when they were relieved by the 7th London Regiment (Post Office Rifles), and rejoined their Battalion in the Rue de l'Epinette.

The following morning, the second day of the

"B" Company
goes forward.

Battle of Festubert, an officer from Brigade Headquarters brought Captain Makin orders. About three-quarters of a mile due east of the village of Festubert was a three-cornered-shaped cluster of trees known as "The Orchard." This had been made a stronghold by the enemy, and was connected to the line then reached in the attack by a narrow communication trench. Captain Makin's orders were to leave two companies behind in support, and with the remainder proceed to this communication trench, clear it, and, after occupying it, make an attack from there on the Orchard.

Wiltshires go
forward.

The Battalion moved off, and after dropping "C" and "D" Companies as support continued forward. The Battalion bombers led, followed by "B" Company and then "A." Up to now the weather had been fine, but just as the Wiltshires neared the fighting on this day rain began to fall, and continued to do so throughout the remainder of the battle. This considerably hindered operations, especially as the ground in this part of the front was intersected by a number of dykes, which were serious enough obstacles, even in fine weather.

Crossing the old German front line, from which the enemy had so recently been driven, the Wiltshires reached the communication trench to which their orders referred. They found that the nearest part of it had been converted into a fire trench, and was occupied by the Staffordshires. The whole position was very exposed, and the trench itself had been severely dealt with by shell fire, so that it afforded but little protection. It was also very narrow, and at first much difficulty was experienced. However, as at first no opposition was made by the Germans, the Wiltshires, by means of the communication trench, succeeded in approaching their objective, the Orchard. It was not until they got within 100 yards of this that our men discovered the Germans entrenched not fifty yards away on the right. Also they saw just ahead of them that the enemy had levelled the right side of the trench they were using. This created a sort of trap, as the Huns had the gap well covered by machine guns. It was found impossible to cross this gap, and a halt was made whilst the bombers endeavoured to drive the Germans from their position. But their attempts failed, as the target was "beyond" their reach. During this bombing the Germans persistently waved white flags, and for the moment it was

thought that they wanted to give themselves up. It was soon found, however, that any man who showed his head was fired upon. If the Germans had intended it for a ruse—and they were certainly capable of doing such things—it failed.

Seeing that to advance further along this trench was impossible, it was decided to work round the right flank of the Huns' position. The Wiltshires, therefore, withdrew about fifty yards, and the bombers, led by Lieutenant Monson, and followed by No. 8 Platoon, left the trench and advanced across the open. At the same time German gunners, having evidently been informed of the Wiltshiremen's movements, opened heavy and accurate shell fire on the communication trench, which, having so recently been occupied by their own men, they knew well.

The bombers of No. 8 Platoon moved across the open for some distance without encountering opposition. But as they neared the enemy's position a sudden withering combined machine gun and rifle fire burst upon them with accuracy, and men fell in alarming numbers. It was impossible to continue the advance against such fire, and to retire was out of the question. Yet there was no cover. The only thing that seemed possible was done; that was for every man to lie flat on the ground. Yet the wisdom of this move was questionable, for, from the Germans' superior position, men were shot as they lay there. Bombers and riflemen were both sadly reduced in numbers. To continue the attack against their enemy, who had not suffered at all, was hopeless. Those who so far survived moved back on their stomachs through the grass to rejoin their Battalion. In doing this more were hit, among them being Lieutenant Monson, a brave man who had led out his bombers hoping to eject successfully the Germans, who were causing so much delay to the advance. He was killed instantly.

Meanwhile the Battalion, that is, "A" and "B" Companies, less No. 8 Platoon, had left the communication trench and occupied the old German trench which they found running off to the right at right angles. Here they had a stronger position, and more or less faced their enemy. It was only necessary to change over the parapet to make it a reasonably good fire trench. The remains of the bombers and No. 8 Platoon managed to rejoin them here within half an hour. It was in getting the men

into this new position that Lieutenant Alexander was badly wounded.

The old German trench was very disconnected, and besides the altering of the parapet a lot of digging work was urgently needed to accommodate all the men. Luckily, darkness came and made this possible. Patrols to protect the diggers kept out in front all night, which, with the exception of a few shots exchanged between "A" Company's patrol and a hostile one, was quiet. The question of rations had also to be seen to, and these, with one exception, were successfully drawn from the transport which had brought them as close to the scene as possible.

The exception was "B" Company. Sergeant Wish had collected the carrying party for his company, and was just starting off when a shell burst in the middle of them. Sergeant Wish and two of his men were killed, and the remainder, about four, were wounded. All the stretcher-bearers were away collecting on the ground the bombers had covered that afternoon. Help, however, was obtained from the stretcher-bearers of a Guards battalion on the left, and the wounded were eventually taken back. Lance-Corporal Gorton, who displayed great courage, was particularly prominent in this trouble.

The following day the attack was continued by Canadians, who, coming fresh into the battle, advanced in strength over the Wiltshires' position and succeeded in pushing out about 350 yards ahead. Here, having joined up with the Guards Brigade line, they proceeded to dig themselves in under heavy shrapnel fire. The Wiltshires thus became a support battalion, and did not move forward again. They remained in their position, being heavily shelled at frequent intervals, until the night of the 19th, when the 8th Canadian Battalion came to relieve them. It was curious that this was the same battalion that had relieved them at La Boutillerie in February. There happened to be a lull at the time, and the relief was successfully and speedily carried out. By 11 p.m. the Wiltshires had assembled once again at Le Touret, that little hamlet some distance behind the line where they had rested before the battle.

After resting for a few hours at Le Touret the Battalion pushed on a little after dawn, marching twelve miles to Robecq, a village on the banks of

May 19th.
Relief.

the Aire—La Bassée Canal, between Bethune and Lillers. Officers and men were completely fatigued, hungry, wet through, and covered in mud. The march to Robecq seemed the longest twelve miles they had ever done. But on arrival the village, to them, was a heavenly spot, where rest and everything they were wanting awaited them. To Robecq

As a Battalion, the Wiltshires' losses in the Battle of Festubert were not as heavy as most of the others in the Division. Twenty-one were killed, and the wounded numbered 137. "B" Company suffered most.

Refreshed by sound sleep, good hot food and a bath, the men soon brightened up again. Robecq was, indeed, an ideal place for a battalion to recuperate in. Left alone there until June 2nd, full advantage was taken of the rest and the work of reorganization and re-equipping pushed forward. In fact, they were also to make a good show of fitness when, on May 27th, the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, General Joffre, accompanied by Sir John French, came to inspect the whole Division on parade.

There were several new arrivals about this time, the Battalion being strengthened by about 150 men, who joined from the base with drafts, and the following officers:—Captain E. H. B. Richardson,* Lieutenants A. St. J. D. C. M. King, B. F. Lyon Williams, D. L. D. Shelford,* and W. T. Sargeant, 2/Lieutenants J. C. Badgley, C. F. B. Hodgins, J. H. Cortis, and E. G. Mack. Also Lieut.-Colonel W. S. Brown returned on June 1st, and once more took command.

The 7th Division now commenced to move once more towards the line, and the 2nd Wiltshires received their marching orders. The day before they left Robecq they were unofficially inspected by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, who was passing through the village, accompanied by Sir Douglas Haig, who at that time commanded the First Army.

The Wiltshires made two short marches. First on June 2nd to Hinges, about five miles south-east of Robecq, and then on the 5th due east to Lecon, a distance of about another three miles. Here they remained until the 14th. Excellent weather assisted June 2nd.
A move towards
the Fighting
again.

*These officers had been wounded in the earlier days of the War.

the training, and many good afternoons were spent bathing in the Aire—La Bassée Canal.

Another draft arrived and three more officers—2/Lieutenants H. H. Morris, H. A. Price, and J. M. Martin. These, together with the rejoining of Captain Gillson, who had recovered from wounds received at Neuve Chapelle, brought the Battalion up to the unusual strength of 35 officers and 1,000 other ranks.

Attention was now directed to just north of that part of the British line where the Aire—La Bassée Canal crossed the opposing trenches. The 7th Division took over this sector, the front line of which ran east of the much-battered village of Givenchy. The position was on a slight rise in the ground, from which the Festubert battle-ground could be plainly seen to the north. The Germans could not see the ground in rear of our trenches, which made it possible to move up troops along the canal banks in daylight. But the position had its disadvantages, for our gunners found direct observation of the enemy's front line most difficult. It was on the German's position opposite this sector that an attack was proposed to take place on the afternoon of the 15th.

Mining operations, which were carried on in this sector practically the whole of the war, were just commencing here, and a lot was expected in the way of assistance from a mine which had been completed and was ready to be fired in conjunction with the attack. But few other preparations had been made.

The Wiltshires, who were to take part in the 21st Brigade's front wave, moved up on the night of 14th—15th, and relieved sections of the Scots Guards and Border Regiment in front trenches so as to be ready in their "jumping-off" positions. The relief was slow and difficult, and this was chiefly due to the communication trenches, which were very narrow, becoming congested with parties moving both ways and trying to squeeze past one another.

The Germans had evidently got wind that something out of the ordinary was going to happen, for during the day, whilst waiting for zero, the Battalion sat under heavy and well-directed shell fire, which caused a number of casualties.

Zero had been fixed for six o'clock that evening, and the moment it arrived the front wave went "over the top" in good order. At the same time our guns supported by "opening up" on the Huns'

June 15th.

Attack from
Givenchy Sector
opens.

line. But there was not enough of it. Also the much-discussed mine went up. Whether it did any great damage to the Germans or not one cannot say. But it certainly did not, as it was intended, subdue the opposition the enemy at once offered.

"C" and "D" Companies went first, closely followed by "B" Company in support. "A" was kept in reserve in the British front line. The moment the front companies appeared above ground German rifles and machine guns swept them with a blaze of accurate fire. Men started to fall all along the line. The attackers pushed doggedly on over most difficult ground, covered, as it was, in debris, long grass, and shell holes. Before the two front companies had even neared the foremost German positions they had only one officer between them unhit, and "B" Company, just in rear, was suffering almost as badly. Colonel Brown then ordered "A" to send forward half its strength, pick up half of "B" Company on the way, and bolster up the leading line of attackers. This was quickly done, and efforts made to push on as far as possible. The enemy's enfilade fire, however, increased from both flanks, and the attack was eventually held up at a disused German trench running in front of the enemy's line. Further orders were received to make a fresh assault from this point, in conjunction with the Yorkshire and Bedfordshire Battalions. But before they were acted upon they were cancelled, and that night the Wiltshires handed over their position to the Bedfordshires and withdrew to "Windy Corner," where they became reserve.

"Windy Corner" was a name given to a small cluster of houses situated on the low ground west of the small hill on which the battle was taking place. Being on a much-used road, it was frequently shelled. Also one of the houses, being tall, was often used as an observation post, which annoyed the German gunners, who made the spot as uncomfortable as possible. Hence its title.

The Wiltshires remained at "Windy Corner" for a few hours only. The little offensive, which had been unsuccessful from the start owing to there being insufficient strength, both of men and artillery, was finally abandoned. At a later date it was learned from prisoners that the enemy had, by means of tapping our telephones, discovered when our infantry assault was to be delivered. This enabled them to remain in their dug-outs until the moment

Battle of
Givenchy col-
lapses.

they were required to man their defences, and so escape all damage from our bombardment.

Back to Robecq. The Battalion had orders to march rearwards, in stages, to rest. Halting one night at Gorre, where they picked up their transport, they continued, and after another night at Hinges reached Robecq, and occupied their old billets.

Colonel Leatham takes command. Here Lieut.-Colonel Brown and Captain Makin left the Battalion, the former prior to commanding the 1st Battalion, and the latter to take up a staff appointment. To replace them, Major B. N. L. Leatham, of the 2nd Yorkshire Regiment, was attached, and assumed command. He was accompanied by Major C. J. Forsyth, of the same battalion, who was appointed Second-in-Command, and also performed the duties of Adjutant. Captain Ponsford, who had been Adjutant to Colonel Brown, returned to the Divisional Cyclists' Company.

**June 27th.
March to Lumbres.** Left alone at Robecq for a few days, the companies were able to clean up and carry out a preliminary organization. On June 27th they got orders to march to Lumbres, a village just south-west of St. Omer, and twenty-six miles distant from Robecq. Here they were to become General Headquarters reserve, and to be temporarily detached from the 21st Brigade.

They reached Aire on the first day's march, and spent the night there in the French infantry barracks. Completing the march the next day, they passed First Army Headquarters, and General Sir Douglas Haig, who took the salute, praised the Battalion for what he had seen.

At Lumbres, where a halt was made for a few days only, the Battalion was joined by Captain E. C. Mudge and 2/Lieutenants R. R. Clay and W. H. G. Durrant, the two latter being attached from the 6th Dorsets; also 2/Lieutenant P. P. Legg, who rejoined from Hospital.

**July 5th.
Move to Wizernes.** Still keeping in the St. Omer area, the Wiltshires moved on to Tournehem, where they spent four days, and then to Wizernes. Here they remained a fortnight, under ideal weather conditions. The surroundings made the daily routine of hard training quite pleasant after the sordid atmosphere of the Givenchy ruins. The billets were excellent, and though the training was strenuous there was plenty of time left for recreation.

**July 19th.
Back to Robecq.** The Wiltshires were taken back to their billets at Robecq in motor-buses on July 19th. Here they

once more became a part of the 21st Brigade, which was occupying the area. More officers joined: Captain W. M. Geddes, who was ill in Gibraltar when the Battalion sailed; 2/Lieutenants E. F. Peal, E. G. Mack, and H. A. Price, from England; and Lieutenant E. L. Francis, who rejoined from hospital.

At Robecq the stay was brief, and on the 22nd a July 22nd.
move was made to Richebourg St. Vaast, where the Division was taking over the sector. The Battalion went straight into the line that night, relieving a battalion of the Queen's Regiment. The sector was a quiet one at the time, but the trenches were in a bad state of repair, and the few casualties that occurred during the tour were due to the stray shots which caught our men whilst they were out at night strengthening the parapet. Lieut. E. L. Francis, just out of hospital, was among these, being badly wounded in the face. The weather was bad during most of the tour, which lasted ten days, and the men were glad when the 15th Sikhs of the Meerut Division arrived and relieved them. Up to the line again.

After relief the Wiltshires marched throughout the night to Les Harisoirs, a little village near Hinges. August 2nd.
Here was found comfort and happiness, for the place had been but little affected by the war. The inhabitants were hospitable, and the billets, though scanty, were good. Having rested and ridded themselves of the Richebourg mud, the Battalion set to on its usual programme of company training, refitting, bathing, etc. There were plenty of open fresh green fields for this, and the La Bassee Canal was very handy for bathing. March to Les Harisoirs.

At Les Harisoirs the 6th Battalion, which had just arrived in France with the 10th Division, was met for the first time. The men were brought together one afternoon at a football match which had been arranged between the rival Battalions. But as the result is not to the credit of the one which made this history enough is said.

On August 13th the Battalion held a great sports meeting, and attended by excellent weather and the Divisional Band the afternoon was most successful. "B" Company, by 17 points, won the day.

The day following this these good days came to an end, and the Division returned once again to trench life. This time the 2nd Wiltshires were to be in Brigade Reserve, and marching to Festubert August 14th.
To trenches at Festubert.

British line, where it crossed the Rue de Cailloux. The position was about three-quarters of a mile in rear of the firing line, which was fairly quiet, and the five days spent there passed without special event. Working parties were sent nightly to the front defences, and during such work a few casualties were incurred.

The Wiltshires moved up to the front line on the night of August 21st, changing places with the 2nd Yorkshires. The fire trenches of this sub-sector ran round the eastern edge of an orchard, a corner of which jutted out towards the enemy, making a small salient in our line. At the tip of this salient the opposing lines were only forty yards apart. The tour would have been a quiet one but for this one spot. All day and all night a quarrel was going on. Rifle grenade and trench mortar duels and sniping were rules rather than exceptions. All those who had frequently to pass round the sub-sector looked upon this spot as one which was most unhealthy. As to those who held that particular part of the line night and day they had little rest.

After five days of this the 20th Brigade arrived and, handing over their line to the 2nd Gordon Highlanders, the Wiltshires withdrew.

August 26th.

To the Givenchy Sector.

Halting for a night at Les Lobes, a small cluster of buildings not far in rear of the line, they marched on to Les Preol, a village just east of Bethune. The rest here, however, was for a couple of days only, and they moved on to take over the line in the Givenchy sector. They relieved the 5th Scottish Rifles, and, together with the remainder of the 21st Brigade, came temporarily under the orders of the 2nd Division.

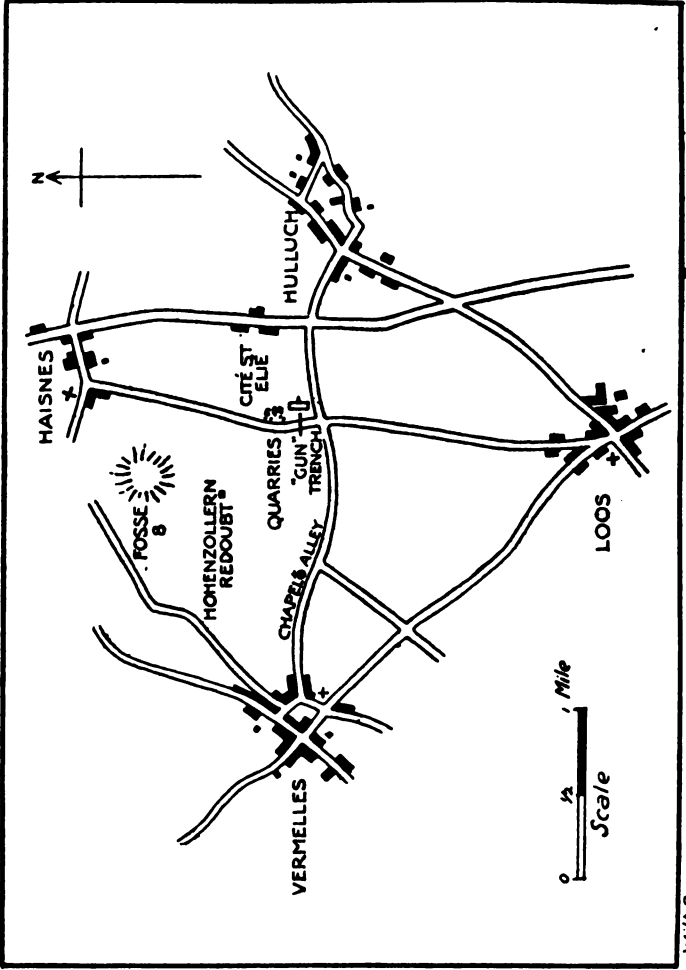
The sub-sector which the Wiltshires took over was on the north bank of the La Bassée Canal, which crossed the line immediately on their right flank. The tour was short, but, like the orchard in their last sector, unpleasant. The only change was that, instead of one part, practically all those who were in the front line experienced the thrills of trench mortar-dodging. No Man's Land was very narrow, and the Huns seemed to find this sector especially adaptable for testing their rotten inventions. Trench mortars, rifle grenades, "flying pigs," and aerial torpedoes all came over in turn, and one never knew what was coming next. There was a knack in avoiding these things as, unlike shells, they took some time in arriving. You listened carefully

for the sound of discharge from the enemy's trench, then you threw up your head and scanned the skies for a sight of the falling missile. It would be a tiny black dot, but with practice you could pick it out fairly quickly. If it was obviously not intended for your fire bay your interests in its movements became suddenly lessened, and you breathed again. If, however, it appeared to be coming your way, you kept your eyes steadily fixed on it; and if, as it drew nearer, you became certain that its destination was your identical fire bay, then you popped quickly into the next one, or, maybe, two or three down on a flank, to borrow a match or inquire the time. Report has it that many stiff necks resulted from this interesting pastime.

On September 3rd, after being relieved by the Glasgow Highlanders, the Battalion withdrew and spent the night in the old French barracks at Bethune. In the morning they marched back to their billets at Les Harisoirs. Never was the Battalion happier than when staying at Les Harisoirs. Everyone appreciated its peaceful greenness after the stretches of hot, broken ground, the barren waste and gloomy aspect of the country always to be found in the region of the trenches. The inhabitants, too, were always pleased to see the Wiltshires marching in. The nearness of the canal and Bethune, the gay, also added to its charms.

Two more officers, 2/Lieutenants J. H. Clark and C. W. Ward, joined here from England.

September 3rd.
Back to Les
Harisoirs.



CHAPTER IV.

THE BATTLE OF LOOS.

THE centre of activity now shifted further south. Several new Divisions, formed from "Kitchener" or Service Battalions, had arrived in the country, and as they took their places in the quiet portions of the line they relieved experienced troops to enable another thrust at the Huns being made before the dreaded winter arrived.

The Commanding Officers had been told that this would be made on a larger scale than ever before in the region of Loos, and it was no surprise to Colonel Leatham when he received orders to move his Battalion down that way to participate in preparations which had already begun.

With the 7th Division the Wiltshires left the Bethune area on September 9th, and arrived at Vermelles after stopping for a night at Le Bourse. Vermelles was a very battered village, three miles north-west of Loos, and the same distance due west of Hulluch. The line ran about a mile and a half east of it, Loos and Hulluch being then in the hands of the Germans. It was fairly big for a village, but at the time the Battalion arrived most of its buildings were all but levelled to the ground, and the inhabitants had long ago abandoned it. Most of this damage had been done some time before in the fighting between the French and the Germans, and with the exception of occasional "strafes" it had enjoyed a respite from the enemy's artillery. But now, as our guns arrived almost daily and took up new positions in the ruins and registered, the Bosche gunners once more took an interest in it, and their "hate" increased daily.

On arrival the Battalion occupied some dry and well-built reserve trenches and dug-outs west of the village. The companies were immediately employed on the work of preparation. They went forward, complete, practically every night to dig assembly trenches, taking their rest by day. With the exception of three days' rest at Verquin, the Wiltshires were engaged on this work right up until the night before the eve of the attack.

September 9th.
A proposed
attack further
south and a
march in that
direction.

On the night of September 23rd they marched back to billets at Verquin through pitch-black darkness and a raging thunderstorm, and arrived drenched to the skin.

"Zero" had been fixed for dawn on the 25th, and the object of putting in a day at Verquin was to make their own last arrangements for the venture. The 24th was a busy day. Final instructions and explanations of the plan were given to the officers and non-commissioned officers, and the companies were issued with all the impedimenta of modern battle, such as spare rations, extra ammunition, bombs, flags and flares, wire cutters, picks, shovels, etc. Every man had a good load to carry over and above his already heavy ordinary equipment by the time the fitting-out was complete. Great things were expected from this attack as, taking a leaf from the Germans' book, the Allies had installed gas cylinders in the front line, and if the wind proved favourable it was intended to attack after liberating a gas cloud. As it turned out, the wind was not altogether in our favour, and though some gas was used it incommoded the attacking troops as much as the Germans.

About half an hour after midnight that night the Wiltshires marched out of Verquin in full battle array. By 3 a.m. on the 25th they were assembled in their allotted trench lines north-west of and close to Vermelles.

September 25th.
Battle of Loos
opens.

Dawn arrived cold, damp, and heavy with mist. The 21st Brigade were not in the first assault, but as 6 a.m., the hour of Zero, approached all eyes were turned in the direction of the line. With a grand thundering roar our guns—more than we had ever before massed together—spoke as one, and the ground shook as the bombardment continued. Mixed with the thousands of shrapnel and high explosive shells, which were bursting all along the line, could be seen a definite wall of thick white smoke, which steadily increased in volume and mounted high into the air. This was from smoke shells, which were being used for the first time to screen the advancing infantry.

A few minutes after Zero, according to plan, the Battalion marched through Vermelles and, moving up a long communication trench known as "Chapel Alley," occupied a part of the line from which the attack had just been launched north of the Vermelles—Hulluch road. The German artillery

retaliation was intense, and as most of it was directed on the original British front line, the Battalion suffered casualties as soon as they got into position. Among some of the first was Captain A. St. J. King, "A" Company's Commander, who was wounded in the abdomen. This officer, known as "Boy King," was close on sixty years of age, and had relinquished an important position in Portuguese East Africa to fight. So keen was he that the Officer Commanding had personally to command him to hand over his Company to his next senior, and he was practically withdrawn by force from the scene of battle by the stretcher-bearers.

Leaving that trench, a most unhealthy spot, the Battalion pushed on across what had been No Man's Land, and followed the 20th Brigade, who were attacking in front. When the old German support lines were reached, a halt was ordered whilst Colonel Leatham gathered his Company Commanders around him to explain the situation and give further instructions.

The Wiltshires
go forward.

The companies, widely extended, were then got into position as follows:—"A" on the right and "B" on the left were in front, each with a two-platoon frontage, the other two in each case being close in rear. A short distance behind the centre of these was "C," in support. Still further in rear was "D," acting as Battalion reserve. This forming-up was done with difficulty, owing to the shelling and stray bullets. Among those who fell at that moment was that gallant young officer 2/Lieutenant Friend, who, whilst getting his platoon into position, received a bullet wound in the chest which, later, proved fatal. But for a rise in the ground, which prevented direct observation of the enemy, these movements would have been impossible.

At a given time the Wiltshires, in conjunction with the 2nd Bedfordshires on their right flank, advanced again in the direction of Cité St Elie. Their right flank moved on the Vermelles—Hulluch road, which divided the two Battalions and acted as a guide to both. Our men moved steadily forward, but as soon as the highest point in the ground was reached they came into full view of the Germans, who were occupying positions in and around the miners' cottages of Cité St. Elie. At once the Germans poured forth a withering and deadly fire from their

rifles and machine guns. Our lines advanced down the reverse slope facing this fusillade, and men fell in distressing numbers. The ground was free of any sort of cover, and the slope, though slight, presented the advancing battalions as most excellent targets for the Huns' shooting, which appeared to be steady and accurate. Those unhit pressed on, seeing their comrades continually falling to the right and the left, and each expected himself to be the next one to fall. The bullets cracked so near their heads as to deafen them, and in some cases even pierced their caps and clothing. It seemed impossible that a single one of them could escape.

Soon the ranks became so depleted and exhausted that it would have been folly to go on. So that when a long line of German works was reached a halt was called and advantage taken of its cover. The works were found to be gun emplacements, complete with an abandoned battery of German field guns. Those of the Wiltshires who had so far been fortunate to get through the gauntlet unscathed now got into the trenches around these gun pits for a breather. Here they found a dozen or so of the 9th Devons, who had been advancing with the 20th Brigade.

The Companies, besides being greatly reduced, were very mixed up, and a hurried attempt at reorganization took place. Then came the word that no further advance was to be made until fresh orders came, and officers and men set to making the best defensive position they could of the broken ditches they were sheltering in. Fire positions were made, blocks constructed in the trenches which led to the enemy, and bombers posted. Also disconnected places were joined up, so that by dusk there was a more or less continuous firing line, which was always known afterwards as "Gun Trench."

Looking back over the ground they had covered, it could be seen what this advance had cost the Battalion. Our poor fellows were scattered all over the slope. Many of the figures were but wounded, and as soon as it was possible the stretcher-bearers carried them to the aid post. But the regimental allowance of stretcher-bearers was small, and their colossal task occupied the whole of that night. The officers killed were Captain Wilson, 2/Lieutenants Hodgins, Clark and Durrant. Major Gillson, whose majority had just been gazetted, was among the wounded. He managed to reach the gun

emplacements, but was ordered by Colonel Leatham to withdraw at nightfall. This deprived "C" Company of its leader, the second Company Commander to fall out of action in the battle.

At dusk the 9th Devons took over the captured gun positions, and the Battalion moved to another front about a quarter of a mile to the left. This was an old German communication trench, "Breslau Avenue," and faced rather more to the north. In this position the Wiltshires' right flank was in touch with the left of the Battalion that had just relieved them.

The night was a particularly dark one, but movement on the right could be seen, as far away as on the other side of the Hulluch road, so clear were figures silhouetted against the distant glare of the burning town of Loos. There was some consternation when quite a number of figures were seen hurrying down the road in the direction of Vermelles. There was still more, when careful watching disclosed the fact that the figures were capped with German helmets. It was later discovered that these were the gunners of the captured battery. They had made a bold attempt to retake their guns, but their numbers were quite inadequate, and the Bedfords and Devons had no difficulty in defeating them. Many were killed, more were taken prisoners, and the Commander committed suicide.

Counter-attacks were to be expected anywhere at any minute, and the Wiltshires worked in reliefs throughout the night, improving the defence of their "Breslau Avenue" and keeping on the look-out.

At dawn Colonel Leatham, taking the first opportunity as soon as the light was strong enough to examine the surroundings with his glasses, was shot in the chest and killed instantly. This was a tremendous shock to officers and men alike, who, having looked upon Colonel Leatham as a great man to have at the head of their Battalion during rest and training, were now filled with admiration for his cool courage and determination as a leader in heavy fighting. It was a bad beginning for the second day of the battle.

The responsibility of command now fell to Major Forsyth. Actually on the front held by the Wiltshires no fighting took place that day, though on the right and the left small local attacks were

The second day
of Loos.

carried out. But shelling went on practically the whole time, and to add to this discomfiture heavy rain began to fall.

After dusk the Battalion was ordered to move to a position a few yards in rear of "Gun Trench," and to dig a trench line parallel to it. This move, though only a matter of a few hundred yards, was exceedingly difficult. The night was rainy and inky black, and movement over the shell-torn, soft and muddy ground was painfully slow. In order to keep direction and to find the way, it was essential to use the Hulluch road. Not only was this being furiously shelled with "pip-squeaks" and heavier material, but also was so congested with traffic, horse and foot, moving both ways and crossways, that it needed every ounce of each officer's skill to prevent losing his men in the general mêlée. What happened was that the Wiltshires got on the road just as the Guards Division was moving up to take their place in the line on the right. This added to the already heavy nightly traffic of ration parties, wounded, ammunition wagons, etc., which always accompanies an attack. It was a marvel that the Battalion was able to reach its destination and carry out its orders, before daybreak put a stop to the digging. But the men upheld the Wiltshires' fame for fine spade work, and, trying as it was, for each scoop of wet earth stuck to the spade, they dug themselves well in before light came. In this new position the Battalion was support to the 1/4th Cameron Highlanders.

The third day.

When it got light the following morning there was a heavy mist, and Major Forsyth, looking round to take his bearings, found it difficult to observe even a few yards ahead. He could, however, distinguish a lot of figures, outlined very like Huns, moving towards the Camerons' line on the left. He had every reason to believe that the Camerons were being attacked. Getting out of the trench, he stood up and gave verbal orders for the Battalion to dash across the open ground and reinforce the front line. He was almost immediately wounded in the leg, but as the rush was being made towards the Camerons he knelt on the grass giving directions. As soon as our men left the trenches a fierce fire was opened upon them, and although the distance was not far only about half reached the Camerons' trenches unhit. It was found, however, that the Camerons had not been

attacked. But the line was weakly held, and there was plenty of room for the Wiltshiremen when they sorted themselves out from the Scotsmen and reorganized.

This rush over the open had been most costly for the Battalion, which was now reduced to what would ordinarily constitute a strong company. Among the casualties were Captains W. M. Geddes and E. C. Mudge, commanders of "B" and "D" Companies respectively, and 2/Lieutenants E. J. Mack and E. L. Schultz, all four being killed. The latter officer reached the Camerons' trench unhit, but, seeing some more men struggling on behind, he got out again, and, whilst giving them encouragement, was shot through the head.

The scanty remains of the Wiltshires were now placed on the left of the Cameron Highlanders. For a long time Major Forsyth refused to go to the ambulance, and was hard at work for the rest of that day collecting men who had lost direction in the morning mist. These he kept in the support trench near the Hulluch road until darkness enabled them to rejoin. Hearing the state of the Battalion the Transport Officer, Lieutenant Shelford, handed over to Sergeant Fulford and started off to take part in the fighting. But on his way he was wounded by shrapnel and taken to hospital.

Nothing of special note took place on the two days that followed. Ceaseless rain put a damper on the operations, and the men stood guarding their line, being more or less heavily shelled the whole time. Major Forsyth was at last compelled to withdraw, and even then he did so reluctantly, in spite of the fact that he had run grave risk of losing his leg altogether for want of attention to his wound. His determination was almost superhuman, and it seemed that nothing less than being killed instantly would divert him from his duty. Later on in the war, when, having recovered from this wound, he was commanding another battalion, the news that he had met his death whilst leading it in action came as a shock to all those who had served with him and admired him.

On the evening of the 29th the 8th King's Liverpools arrived to take over, and the Wiltshires withdrew to the old British line from which the attack started. But there was not much rest that night, for hardly were they settled in these trenches before they were ordered to the line again in support

of the 2nd Bedfordshires, as the enemy had gained a footing in "Gun Trench" after a bombing attack. But their services were not required, and, after trudging some distance over the heavy ground, the order was cancelled and they returned. The machine gun section, however, who had had their guns in position in "Gun Trench" since the 25th, did excellent work in helping to hold up this bombing attack, and one of its guns was able to silence a German machine gun by aiming at its flash while it was in action at a range of about seventy yards. This was a ticklish job, as our gun had to be mounted and laid in the open. Back in the old British line again, where the only thing they needed was rest, the men threw themselves down in the bottom of the trench to sleep. These trenches, now neglected, were quickly filling with water, but, being quite soaked through already, they did not seem to notice it.

Remnants march
from the battle
to Le Preol.

That night the 20th Brigade took over the line, and the Wiltshires were ordered to move to rest at Le Preol. Although there were comfortable billets awaiting them there, it was only with the greatest difficulty that the men accomplished this short march. When they arrived, in the early hours of the first day of that October, the rain had ceased and given way to a sharp frost, which, soaked through as they were, they felt very keenly. Owing to the length of the battle, the fierceness of the fighting and the bad weather, the men showed more fatigue at the end of the Battle of Loos than any of the previous ones.

In this battle the number of men hurriedly recruited from civil life, and sent out after a short training, exceeded that of the hardened serving soldiers in the Battalion. But they withstood the sudden change in life with wonderful tenacity, and took to fighting as ducks to water.

The whole Division had suffered badly, and its casualty list was headed by its great leader, General Capper, who no doubt would have taken an important part in the direction of the British armies in the field had he lived. He was a most gallant leader, and, having thrown his last reserves into the battle, he remarked to his staff, "Now we will go in and play *our* part," being mortally wounded immediately afterwards. His place was taken by Brig.-General Watts, and the 21st Brigade came under the command of Brig.-General Berners.

The casualty list of the 2nd Wiltshires amounted to

9 officers killed, 5 wounded, and about 400 other ranks killed, wounded and missing. Casualties.

The results of the battle were disappointing, the small advance being made at enormous cost and no tactical or strategical advantage being gained. However, much knowledge and experience was obtained, which proved of value in subsequent actions.

The next few days were spent in the comparatively peaceful surroundings of Le Preol, which enabled the much-needed cleaning up and reorganizing to be carried out efficiently.

Captain M. C. Heenan, of the 1st Leinster Regiment, was sent to command this and to command temporarily, and 2/Lieutenant Shepherd was appointed Adjutant. Lieutenant F. R. Mumford arrived with a draft of 50 other ranks, and was followed shortly afterwards by 2/Lieutenants J. G. Frith and H. B. Jones, and later by Lieutenant F. C. Whiting and 2/Lieutenants G. W. Maskell, W. W. Manning, R. W. Brown and R. S. Leggard.

The next move was to Annequin on October 7th, where the Battalion was further strengthened by a draft of twenty-two. The billets were miners' cottages, and there was not much rest during the stay as the front line, not very far off, was being subjected to frequent German attacks, and a lot of time was spent in "standing to." Here Major A. V. P. Martin joined and assumed command, Captain Heenan taking over the duties of Second-in-Command. October 7th.
March to
Annequin.

Major Martin
takes command.

Orders arrived on the 10th to relieve the 1/4th Cameron Highlanders in the line. The Wiltshires left Annequin at once, and halting for the night at Cambrin entered the trenches on the 11th.

The sector was situated between the area of the recent battle and the La Bassée Canal. It faced the little village of Auchy, which was in German hands. The tour was only a short one, and no actual fighting took place. There were a few casualties from the shelling, which was severe, as the sector was on the fringe of the fighting still going on to the south. A considerable amount of patrolling was done at night, as it was not certain what action the Huns were likely to take. Plans were prepared for an attack, to be synchronized with a larger one in the Loos sector, but these were finally abandoned.

There was a humorous incident one night whilst a working party was busy on a much dilapidated

parapet. In those days defence against gas had not been properly organized, though every man carried a flannel bag saturated in chemical ready to put over his head should gas come his way. But a special company of the Royal Engineers had been formed to use gas for offensive purposes, and it had been used with moderate success in the Battle of Loos. In the sector the Battalion now occupied there were a few of this company's cylinders, some empty, embedded in the parapet just referred to. On the night in question, a rather agitated Company Commander rang up Battalion Headquarters and said his company was being gassed. A soft breeze was blowing from the line, and those around Headquarters who sniffed the air certainly did find it rather unnatural. An officer was dispatched immediately to the line to investigate. He found there the grotesque scene that is always presented when everyone met is wearing a gas mask. There was much heated discussion (gas masks compel heat) and much nodding of flannel bags over the possible consequences of such phenomena, and what steps should be taken. The Company Commander and the Headquarters officer moved along the line to make sure that all were prepared, when suddenly they came upon a soldier, sole occupant of a fire bay, who, though seated in a most awkward position, refused to budge, either to stand or to let them pass. Communication was difficult, as all three were masked, but eventually the man managed to explain himself. It appeared that he was one of the working party, and had been setting about his allotted piece of parapet when, in excess of zeal, he put his pick clean through the side of a gas cylinder. To his horror it immediately hissed out gas at great speed, but with most commendable presence of mind he had seized a wet sandbag, thrown it over the hole in the cylinder, and sat on it. He had, however, been held there, waiting for something or someone to turn up, not daring to leave his seat for fear that the escaping gas would fill the trench and do damage.

October 14th.

Relief arrived on the 14th, and the Battalion moved back to Les Harisoirs. Their stay was only short there, and the time was occupied in cleaning up after the trench tour. Two more officers joined, Captain G. P. Steer, attached from the Somerset Light Infantry, and 2/Lieutenant M. S. G. Bigwood, from England.

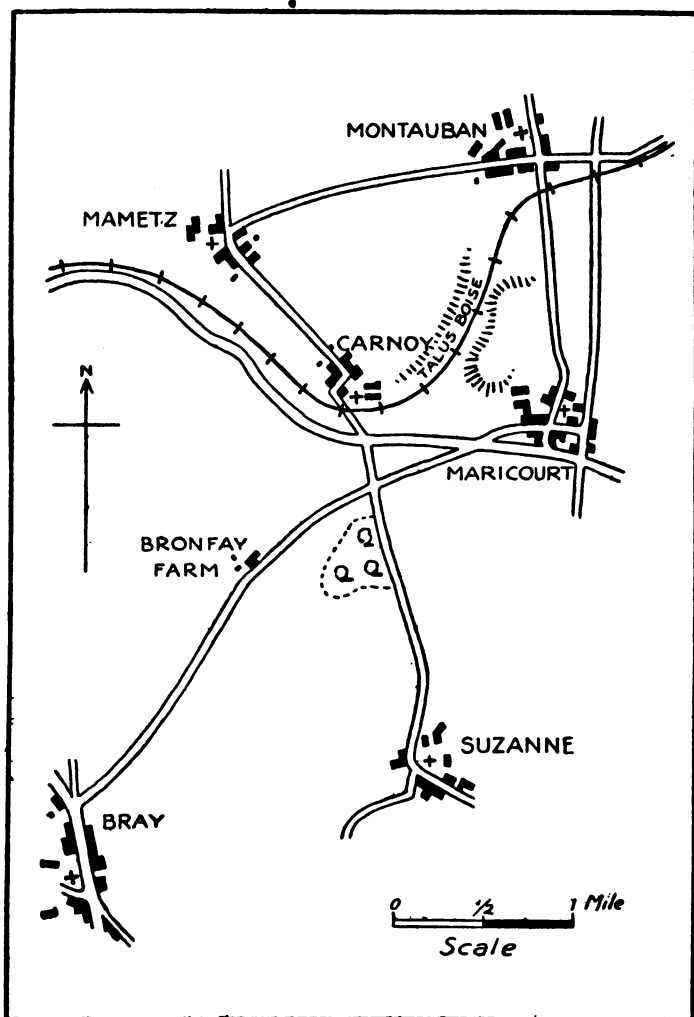
The next move was to St. Hilaire, near Lillers.

Here they were further away from the line, and had better facilities for getting ship-shape. The morning after arrival Major Martin was able to see the whole of his Battalion on parade for the first time since his arrival. On this occasion he presented documents, signed by the Divisional Commander, to the following, whose names had been brought to the latter's notice for conspicuous gallantry in the Battle of Loos:—Regimental Sergeant-Major Hill, Company Sergeant-Major Moss, Sergeants Robinson, Wilson, Jolliffe, Snelgrove, and Vardy, Acting-Sergeant Player, Corporal Williams, Lance-Corporals Cawston, Collins and Baxter, Privates Brown, Gale, Stevens, Ong and Price, and Bandsman Hill.

October 27th.
Move to St.
Hilaire.

On October 20th the Divisional Commander himself visited the Battalion and inspected them on parade. He made the following address:—

“I should like to say a few words to you. I came down to-day because I wanted specially to see you after your very fine performance during the recent fighting, and especially on account of your very fine attack on the 25th. You were ordered to attack, and you advanced in very well-organized formation in a straight line. There was no hesitation; there was no holding back to see whether others were coming on or not. Every man went straight on, and was evidently determined to get there. That was the result of very good training, of very good discipline, combined with a strong sense of duty and the right spirit. You must always remember that the only way to win is for every man to be absolutely determined to go on, quite irrespective of casualties. Once you begin to hesitate, or look to the right and left and behind, to see if others are coming on, it is very unlikely that the attack will be a success. On the other hand, as you know, if you go straight on, nine times out of ten when you get up to the Bosches they surrender, or, if they do not surrender, you have got the satisfaction of putting your bayonet into them. Of course, there will always be losses. You cannot get there without, and in the recent fighting you had your full share, and that added to the credit of what you did. I deplore the loss of so many brave comrades, not the least amongst whom was that gallant soldier, your late Commanding Officer, Major Leatham. I know, and you know, how hard he worked to get the Battalion into the splendid position in which it now is. Well, I congratulate you, and you must keep up that spirit. The Wiltshires will go home with a reputation second to none.”



Wilt.R.

CHAPTER V.

THE SECOND WINTER WITH A NEW DIVISION.

THE 7th Division commenced to move towards the line again on October 25th. On that day the 2nd Wiltshires marched to Les Harisoirs, and after another short stay there continued on to the Givenchy sector.

October 25th
Move to
Givenchy Sector.

Moving up the canal bank they arrived and relieved the 9th Devons, of the 20th Brigade, which had been the first battalion of the Division to take over the line.

The trenches they went into were those with the right flank touching the north bank of the La Bassée Canal. They knew them well, as they had occupied them before.

The oncoming and much dreaded winter had begun to make itself felt. Cold and drenching rain never ceased during that tour. It played havoc with the trenches and raised the sick list. In consequence reliefs were frequent, and each Battalion held their bit of the line for short periods only. But even so the men got little rest, for constant work was necessary to keep up any sort of defensive trenches. The opposing sides took little interest in each other, so busy were they in battling with the elements.

The 7th Division held this part of the line throughout the month of November. Each Battalion did about four days at a time in the line, the Wiltshires changing nearly every time with the Royal Scots Fusiliers. The rests were taken alternately in Brigade reserve (Ferme du Roi in Cuinchy or Le Quesnoy), Divisional reserve (Bethune or Essars), and Corps reserve (Les Harisoirs or Mt. Bernonchon). It was a month of hard digging, and it was only by working the men to their utmost, and also by drawing on the battalions at "rest" for working parties, that any sort of defensive trenches were maintained.

On the 23rd of that month the Command of the Battalion changed again. Lieut.-Colonel R. M. T.

Lieut.-Colonel
Gillson takes
command.

Gillson arrived and took over from Major Martin. The latter became Second-in-Command, and Captain Heenan went on leave to England prior to taking over a company.

Towards the end of the month both sides became very active with their mining operations for which, as before-mentioned, this sector was specially noted. It was a fight in shaft-driving, and competition was very keen. But it was no pleasure to the infantry, who, unable to take part in it themselves, had to stand over it night and day. All possible precautions were taken to prevent the Huns blowing up our trenches without due warning. There were special silent periods ordered each day, during which no one was allowed to make any sort of noise; then expert Royal Engineer listeners would go round and, with their ears to the ground, try to discover any tapplings or other signs of underground workings. This, however, was by no means a sure protection, and some battalions were badly caught and suffered heavy losses.

November 25th.
Mine warfare.

On the 25th, whilst the Wiltshires were in the line, the Royal Engineers blew up two mines under the Huns' front line of trenches opposite the part the Wiltshires were holding. The object was to destroy the heads of enemy mine shafts, but on such occasions the infantry usually tried to gain a little ground by taking advantage of the enemy's embarrassment. Before the earth thrown up by the explosion had come to ground again the 2nd Wiltshires' bombers dashed out to seize the lip of the crater, which, of course, is at once formed if the explosion has been successful. "A" Company, from Battalion reserve, went forward soon after the bombers, and in a very short time the operation was complete and the new position consolidated. The casualties were few, but included some very valuable officers and men. Captain C. G. Bond, late Adjutant of the 4th Battalion in India, who had joined the 2nd but a day or two previously, was killed. When the mine went up he was hit by a large piece of falling earth. These mines threw up enormous lumps of earth to a great height. They returned to earth at high speed, and were impossible to avoid in the dark; one had to take one's chance. Captain G. F. Steer received a wound which, after he had been in hospital at the base for many days, proved fatal. Two very gallant and able officers were thus lost to the Battalion.

At the end of the month 2/Lieutenants J. S. Hayward, P. J. Posener and F. Niall joined, and brought with them a draft of twenty-six non-commissioned officers and men.

With the arrival of December the rain ceased and a keen frost set in. This made movement easier for the men, but at night, when the rations were brought up, the roads became covered with a thin sheet of ice and the draught horses were very difficult to manage.

New Divisions were fast arriving in the country, and one, formed of Royal Fusilier battalions, moved into the 7th Division's area to learn trench warfare by sending parties of men at a time into the line with the older hands of the 7th Division. At the beginning of December this new Division took over the 7th Division's sector altogether. The policy was to "swap" brigades or battalions of the new Divisions with similar formations of the old Divisions, the idea being to mix the experienced with the inexperienced.

It soon became the 7th Division's turn to participate in this scheme, and it was with some bitterness that orders were received to dispatch the 21st Brigade to join the new 30th Division, at that time billeted west of Amiens. There was even more sorrow when it was learned that, on arrival, the Brigade itself would be split up, battalions being interchanged with those in the other two brigades of the new Division. The four Regular Battalions of the 21st Brigade had stuck together and fought side by side since landing at Zeebrugge in October, 1914.

It was a sad parting with the glorious 7th Division when the Wiltshires marched off to Lillers Station to entrain for the south. It was a night journey and very cold. The Battalion was turned out of the train in the early hours of the following morning at the little station of Saleux, south-west of Amiens. The transport was unloaded, and after breakfasting they marched to Le Mesge.

December 6th.
Leaving the
Division.

This village was of the unimportant, dirty, and dilapidated type, and the billets were bad. However, the men were glad to have them, and managed to spend a quiet and restful ten days in them.

The move to the 30th Divisional area was completed by a two days' march to Autheux, halting for the night on the way to Pernois.

December 20th.

Move to Autheux
to join the 30th
Division.

Autheux, though an ancient village, was a great improvement on Le Mesge as regards billets. Here the Battalion came under the orders of the 30th Division, which was then with the XIII Corps in the Third Army. The other two Brigades were the 89th and 90th, but when the 21st arrived most of the battalions, Service Battalions of the King's Liverpool and Manchester Regiments, were away taking instruction in various parts of the line.

The daily training and exercise was not very strenuous, and altogether it was a peaceful time at Autheux. The prospect of spending Christmas in these quiet surroundings after the previous year's experience set everyone thinking of and preparing for that festivity. The Quartermaster, Lieutenant E. O'Hanlon, was one of the busiest men in the Battalion, laying in special stocks for the great day and doing a great deal of friendly bargaining with the civilians. The buildings in the village, though dilapidated, were admirably suited for the purpose. Each company having selected the largest room or barn they could find, set to work decorating it and making ready, so that the complete company could be seated at the Christmas dinner.

Christmas

When the 25th arrived it was celebrated in right good old-fashioned style from morning till night. The cooks were very busy while the padre conducted church parade, during which the carols that were sung brought everyone a step nearer home. The men sat down to what was probably the biggest feast they had had in France, whilst their officers and non-commissioned officers worked hard seeing that all were served. Colonel Gillson paid a visit to each company in turn, toasting their good health and wishing them the compliments of the season. He expressed the pious hope that all may celebrate Christmas Day next year in England with the war well won. He reminded them that they were volunteers, and told them they were in France for one cause, to fight for the Empire. In the evening a very fine concert, organized by Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Smart, was given in "D" Company's billets, and officers and men alike ended the day in the best of spirits.

Nothing special happened during the next few days beyond short daily training and a few demonstrations given for the benefit of the new battalions in the Division.

1916.

Activity started on New Year's Eve, when an order came through for the Battalion to "stand to" and be ready to move. This caused some hustle, but the order was cancelled shortly afterwards. It was later learned that this little alarm was on account of an attack the Germans made on the French near the Somme, but the latter settled the trouble themselves without assistance.

After this the battalions were shuffled and the brigades reorganized. When this had been done, the 21st Brigade was composed as follows:—2nd Yorkshire Regiment, 2nd Wiltshire Regiment, 19th Manchester Regiment, and the 18th King's Liverpool Regiment.

One new officer joined during the stay at Autheux, 2/Lieutenant W. B. Gardner. He arrived on the evening of the 25th, having travelled all day to find the Battalion in its merriest of moods.

The 30th Division commenced moving towards the line on January 6th. This was done by march route, and the 2nd Wiltshires' programme covered five days: To Wargnies on the 6th, Pont Noyelles on the 7th, Vaux-sur-Somme on the 8th, Bray on the 9th, and, finally, into the line on the 10th.

On the last of these days "D" Company and half of "C," transport and Quartermaster's stores were left in Bray, and the remainder marched up to the line after dark and relieved the Queen Victoria Rifles in what was known as the B.I sector.

January 6th.
A move towards
the front

Taking over the
Carnoy Sector.

This sector was just north-east of the little village of Carnoy (north of the Somme), in which Battalion Headquarters was situated. The particular part which the Wiltshires relieved traversed a small ravine known as Talus Boise, through which ran a single track railway, crossing our lines and those of the enemy, and continuing in the direction of Montauban.

All three brigades of the Division went into the line, the 89th on the left of the 21st, and the 90th on the right in front of Maricourt.

The 2nd Wiltshires held their front with two companies, each with their own supports, and kept half a company in reserve at Carnoy, near Headquarters. The remainder were kept in Bray resting, as the arrangement was that the battalions should find their own reliefs. The 21st Brigade had a three-battalion front, the Wiltshires always being in the centre.

The first dawn after the Wiltshires had got into position revealed a Hun in the wire opposite to "B" Company. He had evidently got astray from a German patrol. Being so close at "stand to" the nearest sentry shot him and brought him in. He was found to have many bombs on him, and it was a coincidence that he belonged to the German 62nd Regiment.

The first few days passed quietly, though hostile snipers were busy. They got Captain Heenan on the second night, who, in his capacity as "A" Company Commander, was out in front visiting his listening posts. He died instantly. Captain Heenan, who in a time of emergency had been taken from his own people and sent to lead the Wiltshires, had done great work for the Battalion, and had become very attached to it. His death was a great loss.

On the 14th the Germans started fairly heavy shelling, which increased day by day until the 17th, when they sprung a small mine on the right of the Wiltshires in front of the 18th King's Liverpools. It did no damage, but evidently that was what his artillery was working up for, as afterwards things were much quieter.

Owing to the inclement weather the Battalion carried out its own reliefs every three days. One company and two platoons were always kept at Bray, where the men could have baths and changes of clothing. Each company did six days forward to every three days at Bray. The severe winter, however, had its effect, and the sick lists got heavier, foot trouble being the special bugbear. In consequence the system of reliefs was altered to four days in the line, and two days out for each company, and thus there was an interchange of companies every other day. The continual movement between Bray and the trenches, though tiring, gave the men good exercise, and there was a marked improvement in the foot trouble.

Headquarters remained in the dug-outs at Carnoy the whole time. But the officers and men made themselves as comfortable as possible, and took turns to get into Bray every now and again for baths, etc.

The arrangement was very good from the point of view of administration, etc. The Battalion would work on its own lines, and with its own interests and comfort in view, without having continually to hand over to another. Everyone became to know

the area from A to Z, and things went very smoothly.

Life in the companies' front trenches was, as winter trenches go, not quite so bad as they might have been, and certainly a great improvement on the sort of trenches they had had to occupy in the previous winter. They were fairly well constructed when they took them over, and, owing to the nature of the ground, were easy to drain. Dug-outs were not good, but, then, this sort of accommodation never was as good in British lines as in those of the French and the Germans. (This eventually proved an advantage, as though deep dug-outs were comforting on occasions they were tactically unsound.)

Though the chief annoyance was sniping, the shelling of both sides was erratic and sometimes very heavy. It was really a quiet sector, and casualties were few, but there was one bad day when twelve men were hit. This was on January 28th, when the Huns commenced at dawn to shell the whole front, to put shrapnel over Headquarters and to make the Bray—Carnoy road unhealthy with tear shell. They kept it up all day whilst the Battalion "stood to," an attack being fully expected after such a demonstration. But this did not happen, and the following day was quiet again. There were one or two such alarms during the stay in B.I sub-sector. There was one on February 13th. An enemy deserter, giving himself up some way down the line, had said there was to be an attack against the 30th Division the following morning. The Reserve had to be fetched up from Bray and assembled in battle positions. Battalion Headquarters moved to battle Headquarters, together with the reserve half-company, and all sorts of movements and preparations had to be made. Everything was ready by midnight, and the men stood waiting in their cold and temporary positions for something to happen. Meanwhile the heaviest possible rain fell and drenched them all to the skin. But when dawn came never was one more peaceful. All the birds were singing, and not a shot or shell upset the restful silence. So the six platoons were marched back to Bray, and Headquarters and the reserve half-company returned to their holes in the ground at Carnoy. During the night and morning some candid remarks were passed concerning that Bosche deserter.

Again there was an alarm on the 20th of the same

month. But the attack, which did develop that time, was made against the French Divisions on the right. It was, however, a weak effort, and our Allies had no difficulty in repulsing it.

Two days later the Germans had a go at the Battalion's old Division, the 7th, which had come into the line on the left. But, of course, they had no more success there than they had against the French. The Wiltshires could have told them that.

Every night patrols reconnoitred No Man's Land, and some very fine work was done in that way.

The General Staff sent up some propaganda leaflets in Polish (German Poles were manning the opposite lines), which they wished should somehow be got into the hands of the soldiers opposite. A sergeant and a private of "C" Company volunteered to take these out and fix them in prominent positions on the enemy's wire entanglements. They started out one night and succeeded in reaching the wire, but there agreed to separate in order the more effectively to distribute the leaflets. The sergeant completed his task and returned. But not so the private. Search parties went out, but in vain, and eventually daylight prevented further investigation. The following night the sergeant took another search party out, but although No Man's Land was scoured there was no trace of the missing man, Private Stewart by name. It was taken for granted that the Huns had got him, and he was put down as missing. Some five or six mornings after this, as it was getting light, a sentry shot at something he could see moving in our wire. But seeing a khaki arm thrown up he shouted to a comrade close by, who, in spite of the daylight, dashed out and brought in what he found there. Though the figure of a man, it was terrible to look at. He still lived, but was as near a living skeleton as is possible: covered in mud, torn, bleeding and soaked with rain. When touched the pressure on the skin left a dent which did not fill out again. It seemed impossible to believe that he still lived. While signals were sending an urgent message for the doctor they bathed his face, and recognized him as Private Stewart. He was taken on a stretcher to the aid post, and there, after his wounds had been dressed, he was practically wrapped in cotton wool. It was not until some hours after the doctor's attentions that he was able to speak. In a very thin and almost inaudible voice he described his capture by a German patrol soon after he parted

with the sergeant that night. He told how he was placed between two sentries in the enemy's trench, and catching them half-asleep knocked them down and dashed out into the open. How he kept flat on his face in the grass while he heard them searching for him, and how, when daylight came, he found that he had jumped out on the wrong side of their trenches. How it took him all the rest of the time to cross their trenches unobserved, to get through their wire unheard, and to cross No Man's Land unseen. It had been impossible for him to do anything by daylight, and during that time each day he had had to stay still in the wet grass in one cramped position. And as time went on the starvation, the exposure, and the continual saturation by the heavy rains made him gradually weaker.

Stewart was taken to hospital, and a hard struggle was made to bring him back to normal life. But every effort failed, and this fine example of a British soldier died after lying in hospital for two days.

The regimental transport came nightly to Carnoy to bring the good and necessary things. The Germans tried hard to catch the little convoy or the waiting ration parties by sending over salvoes of shrapnel or high explosives, at what they hoped was the right time. But although there were several "near things" they only once managed to synchronize their "strafe" with the arrival of rations. When this did happen it naturally caused a good deal of commotion, but, luckily, little damage was done. The men of the ration parties could run for cover, but it was the horses and their wagons that gave most trouble. All those who witnessed these ration "strafes" will agree that the men of the transport and their leader, Lieutenant Clay, did some fine work and behaved splendidly.

It was perhaps strange that these "strafes" were sometimes looked upon afterwards as extremely funny. In fact, the more commotion that was caused, provided there were no casualties, the more humorous they appeared after they were over. One night the transport officer and the Quartermaster were returning to Bray across country after reporting all rations up and correct to their Commanding Officer, when a salvo of shell burst near them. Both spurred on their horses to get clear, but it was dark, and the Quartermaster's horse threw its rider into a wet shell hole. But for the soaking the

"Quarter's" got the fall was harmless, and it was such incidents as this that were recounted with great amusement afterwards.

Towards the end of the Wiltshires' first period in the Carnoy sector heavy snow fell and damped the ardour of both sides.

Altogether the Battalion's life in this sector was as good as trench life in winter could be, and such "alarms and excursions" as did happen helped to liven up what was rather a monotonous existence.

Temporary relief came when, on February 27th, the 19th King's Liverpool Regiment, of the 89th Brigade, took over the sub-sector for five days. This was not much of a rest for the Wiltshires, who moved first into Bray and Froissy and then to Bronfay Farm, the latter being a sort of half-way house on the Bray—Carnoy road. From each of these places the companies were kept busy on working parties. But although not restful, it was excellent for the men's feet, which had got very out of condition by continuous trench duty.

March 5th.
30th Division
leaves Carnoy
Sector.

The Battalion took over from the 19th King's Liverpool Regiment for two days, and then the whole Division was relieved. This relief was carried out in deep snow. The Wiltshires handed over their line to the 12th Middlesex Regiment.

After this relief the Battalion moved to the billets and huts they had occupied before in Bray and Froissy. A week passed here, the companies sending out working parties night and day, employed principally on defences north of Suzanne.

March 14th.
Marching back
to rest.

On March 14th the Division made its first march rearwards towards the rest area. It had been in the forward area, each brigade doing almost continuous trench-holding for over two months, so that everyone looked happy as they marched out of Bray towards the more peaceful country. The Wiltshires made their march early, and Corbie was reached by 10.30 a.m. Two days later they entrained for Hangest, excepting "B" Company, which had left the day before for Pont Noyelles to do some work there on a new light railway. The train stopped at Amiens in order to drop No. 11 Platoon, which was to be attached to the Lancashire Hussars at Fremont for brushwood cutting. Arriving at Hangest the remainder of the Battalion marched to Flixecourt, and there took over very good billets.

At Flixecourt.

Flixecourt, a few miles from Amiens, was a well-built village, fairly modern and but little affected by

the war. It was one of the many in that part of France in which Saint Freres had a canvas-weaving works, in which many of the inhabitants were employed. This factory was working hard on sand-bags, etc., for the French Army during the Battalion's stay. The principal British occupants when the 2nd Wiltshires arrived were the Fourth Army School for officers and non-commissioned officers. They had just taken over the organization from the Third Army. The Wiltshires spent a very good time helping them to set up.

The Battalion moved on to Picquigny, this time March 29th.
all complete, the outlying detachments having joined Picquigny.
in again.

Picquigny was an open country village a few miles west of Amiens. The weather was good on the day they moved, and they were lucky in this respect for most of their stay there. The place, with its fine air and freshness, inspired one with delight at once on arrival.

Headquarters and "B" Company remained there throughout April, but half-way through that month "A" and "D" Companies went to Querrieux and "C" Company to Ailly-sur-Somme to assist the Royal Engineers' work at those places. Ailly and Poulainville (to which "C" moved a few days later) were both only a few miles away, and so could often be visited and kept in close touch with Headquarters. Querrieux, on the other hand, was on the other side of Amiens, and "A" and "D" Companies had to be left practically to themselves.

Life at all three places was all that could be desired. The villagers were most friendly, and the men had a fair amount of time each day to themselves. The Battalion went through what had become to be known as a "fattening-up process," and towards the end of their stay all looked very hale and hearty.

At this time that great little man, Regimental Sergeant-Major Hill, was commissioned, and became 2/Lieutenant Hill, of "B" Company. The vacancy for Regimental Sergeant-Major was filled temporarily by Company Sergeant-Major Waite.

It was with mixed feelings that each detachment May 1st.
packed up and marched back to Corbie when the Towards the
order came. Here the Battalion again assembled line again.
with the rest of the Division on its way to the line again.

The 30th Division had been ordered to take over

the same part of the line as it had previously held opposite Carnoy and Maricourt.

The 2nd Wiltshires moved on from Corbie to Bray, and on May 3rd relieved the 11th Royal Fusiliers, but in A.1 sub-sector this time, being to the right of the line they had held before. They remained there for six days, but nothing of special importance occurred. The Germans were quiet, and we took no offensive action, bar patrolling at night, as near to their lines as possible.

The 19th Manchesters took over these trenches on the 9th, and the Wiltshires moved to Bronfay Farm (Headquarters and "B" Company) and Billon Wood (remainder). Both were in easy reach of the enemy's artillery, but at that time he did not often shell Bronfay Farm. Billon Wood lay in a hollow east of Bronfay Farm, and the men were accommodated in huts and dug-outs. This area the enemy was shelling more frequently, but he seldom got on to the actual spot where the men were.

After six days in this position the Battalion went up to the line again. So on went the programme throughout the month of May, each time inter-changing with the 19th Manchesters, but going to Bray for the second "out" period instead of Bronfay Farm, etc.

Towards the end of the month, as one moved about the area, it became obvious that preparations were commencing for an offensive on a bigger scale than any the British had yet undertaken.

At one part of the front line of the sub-sector the Wiltshires and Manchesters were now taking turns to hold there was a re-entrant, and in view of this coming offensive it was decided to straighten the line. To accomplish this the 2nd Wiltshires were ordered to dig a trench from one given point to another in conjunction with the 2nd Bedfordshires, who were to do the same on the left. The sight fixed for the new trench was approximately 100 yards in front of the old. As the Hun would be certain to shell the position as soon as daylight revealed to him the fresh earth thrown up, it was necessary that the whole task should be finished in one night. May 28th was the night chosen for the operation.

First the Manchesters arrived and took over the old front line. Then the Wiltshires advanced to the new site, which had been previously taped out by the Royal Engineers. It was a novel and

difficult enterprise for a whole battalion to go digging some distance in front of the front line. The cloak of darkness was all that protected such a target for the Germans. But Colonel Gillson had taken such pains in organizing the work and preparing officers and men beforehand, that everything went smoothly. Thanks to this and the fact that Wiltshiremen are hard diggers, the trench, nearly 400 yards long, was completed right under the Huns' noses before daylight, and there were only three casualties. Before the sun was properly up the Battalion had assembled a little way behind the line, at a point known as Ravine Copse. There, glad to have successfully completed their task, everyone pounced on the hot cocoa the cooks had ready for them.

Having rested for an hour or so, the companies made their way to Bray. But one night only was spent there, as orders were received to relieve the 2nd Bedfordshires in a series of defences in rear of the line at Maricourt. This was done, and the next six days passed quietly there. But although the position was a comparatively peaceful one, there was little rest, as the companies were kept very busy supplying working parties for the Royal Engineers.

A French division, arriving straight from the hard fighting at Verdun, came into the line on the right of the 30th Division. The French 153rd Regiment coming into position close by, Captain Mumford, in the absence of Colonel Gillson (on leave), entertained their Colonel and some of his staff.

On June 5th the Battalion went back to the line, which now included the trench they had recently dug, relieving the Manchesters once again. There was a lot to be done, especially in the new part, improving the trench and erecting wire entanglements in front. But luckily the line was quiet, and the work proceeded without event until the 11th, when the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers arrived and took over.

Immediately after relief the Wiltshires marched to Heilly in the early morning, halting for a few hours at Bois Celestins. From Heilly they moved on by train to Picquigny, and thence, by march, to Saisseval, where they went into billets late in the evening.

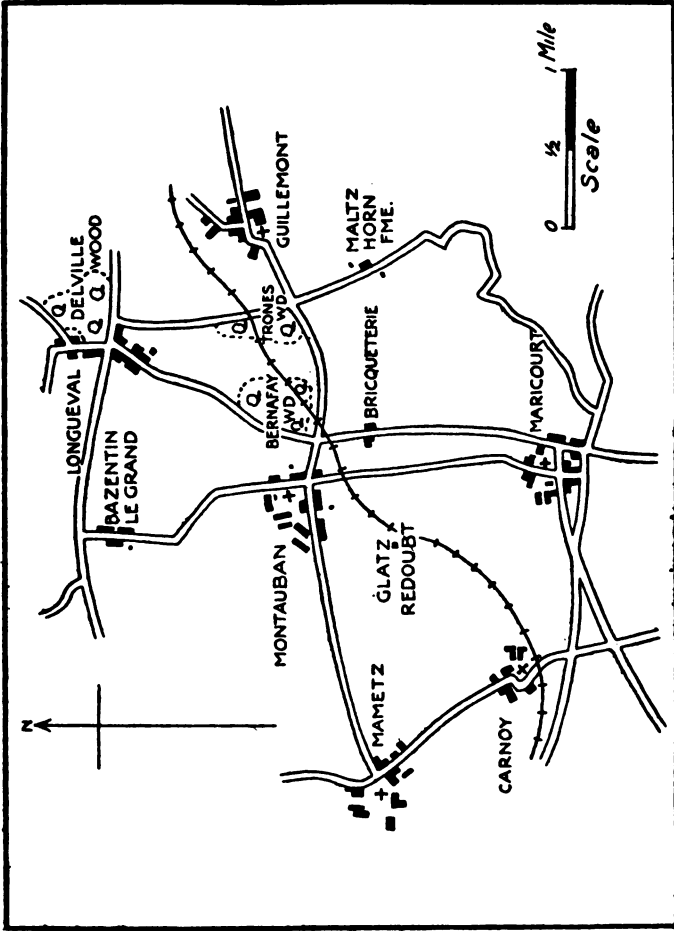
June 11th.
Training for the
offensive at
Saisseval.

Saisseval was close to a large training theatre which had been specially prepared to rehearse the 30th Division in the part they were to play in the

opening attack of the coming offensive. The ground had been carefully chosen, and various objects were set up to represent, as near as possible, those features that would be found on the actual battlefields the troops were to traverse. The training was thorough and complete. The first day the men rested while officers and non-commissioned officers went carefully over the ground. This done, the men were taken over the ground and the positions and scheme fully explained to them. Next, the actual attacks were practised by the battalions, one at a time, and finally each Brigade assembled on the ground in turn and repeatedly carried out their manœuvres. The training went on intensively until, when it came to an end on the 20th, every officer, non-commissioned officer and man knew exactly what part he was expected to play in the real thing.

Leaving Saisseval, when the Brigade commenced its move back to the line, the Wiltshires marched to Bray, halting for a night in tents on the banks of the Somme at Vaux.

During this march the Battalion was specially complimented on their march discipline by General Maxse, who at the time commanded the 18th Division.



Wilt.R.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTALION'S FIRST PART IN THE SOMME OFFENSIVE.

THE Somme Battle, or, rather, the Somme Offensive, for it occupied the whole summer of 1916 and continued well into the autumn of that year, was perhaps the most distinctive of all attacks the British made on the Germans in the Great War. It was also the first in which both sides were fairly matched in all types of artillery, heavy and light, and, in fact, equipment generally. It was the first, too, in which our High Command had forces of a reasonable numerical strength at its disposal. There were now many new Divisions in France formed of Service Battalions (Kitchener, Derby men, etc.), all sufficiently well trained to take part in the fight.

The night following their arrival in Bray, the Wiltshires were ordered to move up to the line and relieve the 19th King's Liverpool Regiment in the same sub-sector they had occupied before in front of Carnoy and facing Montauban. This time they occupied the front line with two companies, the remainder being echeloned in rear, in trenches known as Headquarters Avenue, Gillson Street (named after their Colonel), and "U" Works, a small redoubt on the reserve line.

June 22nd.
Back to the
Carnoy Sector.

The day chosen for the launching of the first attack was to be known as "Z" day, and the days preceding that by letters in the alphabetical order. The day after the Wiltshires had taken over their trenches was "U" day, or five days before that chosen for Zero. It was on "U" day that our artillery commenced their long preliminary bombardment, and on the days which followed, "V," "W," "X" and "Y" days, they never ceased to pump into the enemy's lines, gun positions and back areas a steady rain of shell, which tore up the ground all round the Huns, and gradually obliterated the whole countryside they were occupying.

During these days and nights the Wiltshires were busy reconnoitring the ground in front of them.

By vigorous patrolling they got control of No Man's Land, and carefully examined the German front line. In this way they were able to get a very fair idea of the damage our artillery was causing. Especially useful was the examination by these patrols of the enemy's wire entanglements, that bugbear of all who contemplated attacking a strongly defended line. In some cases patrols found it possible to enter and examine parts of the Germans' front line trenches, as it often happened that during the day our shelling had made them uninhabitable. In such cases patrols invariably reported evidence of suffering and confusion they had found there.

Those engaged on these patrols were deserving of the highest praise. The work was trying and precarious, particularly owing to the bad state of the ground after the bombarding, and the pitch black darkness of the nights. In spite of the many difficulties through the enthusiasm of these patrols, we won control of No Man's Land right up to the moment of the assault, and were able to collect information which was invaluable to the attackers.

One who particularly distinguished himself in these doings was 2/Lieutenant J. McWhannel. "Jock," as his brother officers knew him, joined the Battalion early in the year on receiving a commission from the ranks of the 2nd Dragoons. He had a great personality, and the opening of the Somme Offensive was the first chance the Battalion had of seeing him in serious business, and, sad to say, the last. His hatred of the Hun and love of adventure attracted him towards the enemy's "country," usually with intent to kill. Sometimes he would lead a patrol and sometimes go unaccompanied, but always his behaviour thrilled those who watched him. It was a great blow to the Wiltshires when, on the first day of the assault, this gallant officer received a fatal wound in the chest. Among the many others who did fine work in patrolling 2/Lieutenants W. B. Wood, J. C. Badgley and J. M. Martin, Sergeants Jolliffe and Sly were much in evidence.

The scheme of attack, as far as the 30th Division was concerned, was as follows:—The 21st Brigade, at the moment of Zero, was to advance under the barrage and secure a fortification the Germans had constructed in the valley between their front line and Montauban. This was a large and complicated network of trenches which had been given the name

of Glatz Redoubt. Aeroplane photos of it had been issued to all the battalions which were connected with the task of seizing it. The 90th Brigade were to follow up close in rear, and as soon as Glatz Redoubt had been taken were to pass through the 21st Brigade and capture the village of Montauban.

The plans of the 21st Brigade were for the 19th Manchesters and the 18th King's Liverpools to make the initial assault, with the 2nd Yorkshires in support and the 2nd Wiltshires in reserve. The reserve battalion was to keep the assaulting battalions continuously supplied with ammunition, materials for consolidation, etc. Also they were to man the "jumping off" line with a skeleton force after it had been vacated.

For this latter duty Colonel Gillson detailed "D" Company. His remaining three companies he organized into carrying parties without splitting company organization. All these duties had been rehearsed over and over again at Saisseval, and every man knew what he had to do.

The arrangement was for the support and reserve battalions to hold the front line until just before the attack was to take place, so as to give the assaulting battalions as much rest as possible. With this in view, the Wiltshires had been holding the line, and on the night of the 27th, "X" day, were relieved by the 18th King's Liverpool Regiment. But the day following orders came in postponing "Z" day for two days. The Wiltshires therefore took over the front line again for the intervening time. But when the anxiously awaited "Z" day arrived the battalions were all in their arranged assembly positions, that of the Wiltshires being Battle Street, a trench a few hundred yards in rear of the firing line.

At Zero, which was about the hour of dawn on the first day of July, the great offensive was launched to the tune of the hurricane bombardment which accompanied it. It was a fine, warm, but misty summer morning. Observation was not good at first, but from the high ground in rear of our position the thin, well-drilled khaki lines could be seen steadily advancing in perfect order, carrying all before them.

July 1st.
Somme offensive
opens.

Much has been written of the Somme battles, and it is only intended to describe it here in so far as it affected the 2nd Wiltshire Regiment. In some parts of the line the attack was held up and plans had to be altered. But on the 30th Division's front

the opening day was a magnificent and victorious one. Everything went like clockwork and according to plan. It was a masterpiece of efficiency and the result of good training.

Glatz Redoubt was captured within the arranged time, and the 90th Brigade swept through the 21st, and, after a stiff fight, got complete possession of Montauban. By the time darkness fell the Division had taken all its objectives.

Although not actually in the assault, the Wiltshires, especially "A," "B" and "C" Companies, had a hard day. As soon as Glatz Redoubt had been taken these companies set out with all sorts of food, ammunition, picks, shovels, etc., and, after depositing these with one or the other of the front battalions, they returned to fetch another load and repeat the operation. Backwards and forwards they went, over the shell-torn ground and under the trying July sun, bearing their heavy burdens.

The distance from the source of supply to the captured position was about one and a half miles.

There was no path, and the whole way the ground was pitted with deep shell holes. Many gaping trenches lay between the carrying parties and their destination, and these had to be crossed, each man with his load. The Germans put in a good deal of wild shelling, of which these parties had to run the gauntlet. But they stuck at it all day long, each company doing many journeys and thus enabling the ground won to be safely consolidated.

But this was only a beginning. The night which followed was full of trouble. The Germans were very loath to part with Montauban. It stood on high ground and commanded a wide area of the country on to which they had now been driven. Having lost it to the 90th Brigade, they concentrated a large portion of their artillery on the village and continually threw in counter-attacks during the night. These were each time beaten off, but, looking up to Montauban, through the darkness one could see the frequent rocket calls for artillery assistance which the battalions of the 90th Brigade were sending up, and also the agitated signal lamps flashing messages to Brigade Headquarters.

The Second Day.

The Wiltshires continued the carrying work through the night, and were still hard at it when, at 2.30 a.m., the 90th Brigade called on the 21st for assistance. Colonel Gillson was at

once ordered to take his Battalion to Montauban and assist in holding the village. The Wiltshires were assembled and started at 4.30 a.m., the move over the valley and up the hill being made under heavy shell fire, which became more intense as they neared their destination. They passed through the Royal Scots Fusiliers, who were in an exposed and untraversed trench south of the village. They pressed on into Montauban, where things had the appearance of a horrible nightmare. The Germans were furiously pounding the area, and bit by bit men were being shelled out of their positions. The country about here was very thickly wooded, and it was impossible for some time to know what was actually going on. Pressing on, sometimes across the open and often exposed to the full daylight view of the enemy's positions; crossing open roads carefully covered by the enemy's machine guns; falling in and out of deep shell holes and continuously played on by the enemy's intense artillery fire; in fact, battling against odds that in cold blood would seem to make headway impossible, the Wiltshires finally arrived to reinforce the thin front line of the 90th Brigade in a long rough trench on the northern outskirts of Montauban.

There was more order here, though there were some terrible scenes. Built into the trench was a long, lightly-covered shelter, full to overflowing with British and German wounded. In the trench itself were many wounded who could find no room in the shelter, and there patiently waited to be helped back. The line of khaki was broken here and there with the field grey uniforms of German dead or dying. Looking out towards the enemy, one could at once realize the importance of the position the 90th Brigade had taken and were clinging to so steadfastly. From this trench could be observed miles of ground lying out beyond Longueval and Bazentin le Grand.

The Wiltshires held this position for the remainder of the day. Although he made no further counter-attack, the enemy caused a lot of trouble by getting the exact range of the trench with low-bursting shrapnel of the "woolly-bear" type.

Late that night troops of the 9th Division arrived on the scene, with orders to take over the area. The relief was a lengthy business, as those going out were as new to their surroundings as those

Night of July
2nd.

Relief by the
9th Division.

coming in. The handing over was finally completed at 4.30 the next morning, and the Wiltshires trekked back to their original assembly positions near Talus Boise. In this part things were now fairly peaceful, and the men dropped just anywhere about the trench, glad for the chance to sleep. They named the village they had just left "Mont o' no bon," and all expressed a wish never to see the —! place again. Considering the severity of the fire under which the movements were made in these operations, the casualties were very slight. They were: 1 officer died of wounds, 8 other ranks killed and 39 wounded.

The next evening the Battalion withdrew to the Bois des Tailles, west of Bray, and bivouacked. Soon after arrival here, orders, counter-orders, and corrections to orders were received, arranging a new attack which the 21st Brigade was to make in conjunction with the French. About half a mile east of Montauban was Bernafay Wood, and beyond that, about 500 yards away, was Trônes Wood. Due south of the latter, about half way to Hardecourt, were the ruins of Maltz Horn Farm. A straight trench ran along the eastern edge of Trônes Wood and extended south, connecting up with the farm. This trench was called Maltz Horn Alley. Trônes Wood was pear shaped, about a mile long north to south and half a mile across. Although the heavy shelling it was getting at that time was quickly thinning it, it was still too dense to see what was going on inside or in rear of it.

The situation then was that the Huns had been driven out of Bernafay, but were holding a line west of Trônes and were in possession of that wood, Maltz Horn Alley and the farm. Our line ran along the eastern edge of Bernafay and thence due south to the left flank of the French, which was about opposite to Maltz Horn Farm.

The scheme of the proposed attack was that the 21st Brigade, in conjunction with the French on the right, should advance and seize a position approximately along the line of the Longueval—Hardecourt road. On this road the eastern edge of Trônes and Maltz Horn Farm were the two most important points. From both there was a clear view eastward in the direction of Guillemont and Combles. Even on the map, the value of these positions for further advance is obvious.

The plan of the 21st Brigade was that the 2nd

Yorkshires should assemble in Bernafay Wood in the early hours of the morning, and from there launch an attack on Trônes, clear it of the enemy, and seize the eastern edge. The 2nd Wiltshires were to assemble half in Bernafay and half in a bricqueterie, a ruined mass of bricks about half a mile due south. The half assembled in Bernafay was to move into Trônes after the Yorkshires, and thence to descend, in a flanking attack, on the German positions along the Hardecourt road, push south in the direction of Maltz Horn Farm, and get into touch with the French. All this was carefully explained to the officers and men as they rested in Bois des Tailles.

The Zero of this attack had been fixed for the morning of July 8th, and the previous evening the Wiltshires moved up to their old position, Gillson Street, so as to be near their assembly positions. Some time before dawn the Battalion moved again, "B" and "C" Companies going to Bernafay Wood to be ready in rear of the Yorkshires, and "A" and "D" to the bricqueterie to be in reserve. Colonel Gillson sent his Headquarters to some dug-outs adjacent to the bricqueterie, where also were the Yorkshires' Headquarters, but he himself personally assembled his two companies in Bernafay before going there.

Unfortunately, it got light before the whole of the troops were concentrated under cover of the growth of the wood. Our men had to approach the wood at its south-west corner, which was under enemy observation from a point somewhere between Longueval and Bazentin le Grand. The Germans spotted the tail end of the last company, and put over some very unhealthy shrapnel. This they kept up for the remainder of the morning, and it did a fair amount of damage. They were assisted in their shooting by the fact that two main roads and a railway met near their target.

As soon as the assembling was completed the Yorkshires launched their attack; and almost as soon did they find that the odds were against them. Leaving Bernafay, they were confronted with the open space between the two woods, which exposed them to a murderous fire. The Germans, on the other hand, very little damaged by our artillery, were able to shoot to their hearts' content from the plentiful cover of Trônes. Some said that they had two field guns on the western edge of the wood firing point

blank at the Yorkshires. Although they could see that the fight was against them, the Green Howards made a most determined effort to reach their objective. Their ranks, however, were thinned too quickly, and they were compelled to withdraw to Bernafay. News to this effect was sent through to their Headquarters at the bricqueterie, and their Colonel consulted on the field telephone with the Brigadier as to the next course to take.

In the meantime the French had carried out their attack successfully, and were waiting on their objective for the British to clear the Huns from Maltz Horn trench and come into position on their left flank as arranged. The Commander of the French left battalion became very anxious as to his left flank, and dispatched an officer to the bricqueterie requesting that something should be done to protect him. The Yorkshires had been hard hit in their attempt to reach Trônes, and their losses made it impossible for them to be used for further offensive action that day.

It was therefore decided that—

(1) "A" Company, 2nd Wiltshires, should at once make their way across the open to Maltz Horn Farm, make a frontal attack on the German position there, and establish itself on the left flank of the French.

(2) The remainder of the Wiltshires should, at 1 p.m., after a further bombardment of Trônes, make another attack on that wood.

As soon as Captain C. W. Ward, Commander of "A" Company, got his orders, he assembled his men and led them out over the shell-torn ground in the direction of his objective. Maltz Horn Farm was nothing more than a mound of ruins, and, standing on rather high ground, as it did, it could be seen from the bricqueterie silhouetted against the sky line. This served as a guide to Captain Ward, but neither he nor any of his Company had any knowledge of the ground they were about to cover. They had some two miles to go to reach their objective, and across such shell-torn country it was hard going too. As the Company neared the enemy they deployed into open order, and later, coming under the enemy's fire, they broke into a steady run. Finally they charged Maltz Horn trench with a fine display of dash which won the day for them. They soon seized their objective, and took some prisoners as well. It was a fine performance. They got into

touch with the French battalion on their right, who were very relieved to find troops at last on their exposed flank. The operation was carried out with marvellously few casualties, and showed the keen spirit which ran through the ranks of the Company.

And now as to the main attack on Trônes Wood. Almost simultaneously with "A" Company's move "D" Company was sent from the bricqueterie to Bernafay Wood, where the whole Battalion, with the exception of "A," got into position for the advance. This operation was no easy matter, as the density of the trees prevented one from seeing far, and the whole time shells were furiously bouncing and bursting all over the wood. Anyone who has had experience of this war would sympathize with a Commander who is called upon to repeat an operation in which, only a few hours previously, other troops have failed. The men are none too heartened by hearing how the first attack has fared, knowing that they have to cover the same ground under the same conditions. On the other hand, the enemy, especially if the second attempt is heralded by a fresh bombardment, know exactly what to expect, and are well prepared. Time was short, and preparations were hurried. Colonel Gillson was very active among his three companies in Bernafay getting them placed as he wanted them, and explaining his plans. At precisely one o'clock, getting well in front of his men and shouting to them to come on, he led the way across the open. The Wiltshires poured out of Bernafay, and under the fusillade which the Huns immediately opened on them they descended on Trônes in a steady and determined line. Many good men were lost in getting across that exposed piece of ground, but the Battalion was successful in reaching the western edge of the southern half of the wood in sufficient strength to deal with their enemy who awaited them. Then as the Wiltshiremen threw themselves at many points of entrance to the wood they came into close contact with the Huns, and there was a real old-fashioned clash of arms. Hand-to-hand fighting and close shooting, so little experienced in this scientific war, was realized during those exciting moments. Colonel Gillson, who was first into Trônes, led his Battalion to penetrate the wood, and penetrate it they did. He inspired the men in this great moment when every ounce of strength was needed to achieve success. They hurled themselves between the

closely-growing trees with such force that the Germans were gradually compelled either to fall to their weapons or retire with speed. The thickness of the wood broke up the ranks into small parties, and there was some wonderfully good leading displayed by Company and Platoon Commanders and splendid individuality by the men. As an instance of this, it is related how Sergeant Sly bayoneted three Germans in quick succession, only to be bayoneted himself by a Hun who was concealed behind a tree. This Hun, however, was bayoneted by Sergeant Jolliffe while he was in the very act of attacking Sergeant Sly. Others who were conspicuous in this part of the field were Sergeants Williams and Wildman, Corporal Leslie, and Private Moore, all of Nos. 15 and 16 Platoons. On they went, crashing over ground quite unknown to them, till at last they reached their goal, the eastern edge. They at once commenced to dig themselves in in a defensive line, and it was here that so many casualties were incurred. Hun snipers lay in the long grass on the outskirts of the wood and picked off our men as they appeared through the gaps in the trees. Two German officers were spotted lying out in front watching the movements of the Battalion through field glasses. They were promptly dealt with by Privates Moore and Chapman. Two or three platoons on the left of the Battalion's attacking line manned an old German communication trench which cut right across the wood in a north-eastern direction on the Wiltshires' left flank. This was known as "Dead Man's Trench," and the men immediately set to work turning it into a fire trench, facing north, as the northern half of the wood had not been taken, and there were signs that the Germans would make their inevitable counter-attack from this direction. In fact, no sooner had the platoons manned the trench than small parties of Huns commenced creeping up to throw bombs into the trench. A gap existed between these platoons and the main portion of the Battalion, and Colonel Gillson, who was lying inside the wood wounded by a shell, sent for reinforcements. Finding himself unable to do any more, Colonel Gillson handed over his Battalion to Captain Mumford, Commander of "D" Company. But that officer was killed very shortly after, 2/Lieutenant Bigwood, Officer Commanding "B" Company, and 2/Lieutenant Bageley, Officer Commanding "C"

Company, had been wounded earlier in the attack, and thus all three Company Commanders, as well as the Commanding Officer, had become *hors de combat*. The officer casualty list was a particularly heavy one, as, in addition to these, 2/Lieutenants Hill and Vidler were killed (the latter before the Battalion left Bernafay Wood), 2/Lieutenants Posener and Young wounded, and 2/Lieutenant Dehn, the Lewis gun officer, was captured whilst going round his teams. The death of 2/Lieutenant Hill so soon after his promotion from Regimental Sergeant-Major was a great loss to the Battalion. As a Platoon Commander he exhibited reckless bravery, and had he lived his courage and personality would have insured him rapid promotion. The losses in non-commissioned officers and men had been extremely heavy also, and, in fact, the Wiltshires now held on to their portion of the wood with an inadequate force, and were in a somewhat precarious position. Colonel Gillson, whilst still lying where he fell and unable to move, now told his Adjutant, Lieutenant Shepherd, to take control, and instructed him as to the placing of reinforcements when they arrived, and especially to guard against the danger of the left flank. Colonel Gillson, however, still refused to be carried away by the stretcher-bearers, and remained on the battlefield some time until his remaining officers had assured him that they would not leave the wood whilst one of them remained alive unless relieved. The situation was fairly quiet at the south-east corner of the wood, and the Adjutant went to "Dead Man's Trench," where the Huns were still making intermittent bombing attacks. A company of Manchesters arrived to reinforce, and this he placed to fill the gap between the men in "Dead Man's Trench" and the main part of the Battalion. Further reinforcements were said to be on the way from Bernafay Wood. Everything was done to strengthen the defence against the northern half of the wood, and parties of Huns which came up close, under cover of the trees, and tried to make a lodgement in the trench, were beaten off. Later in the day more messages were sent for reinforcements, but the two men sent, each carrying a separate message, were both hit, and did not reach their destination. Private F. Matthews, of "C" Company, one of these, was particularly courageous. He came into contact with some Huns soon after

starting, but made a most determined fight, and, after getting nearly all his clothes torn from his back, shot more than one of his assailants and got away. He still hung on to his message, but was severely wounded in the thigh with an explosive bullet. The message was found on him later in hospital in England.

However, reinforcements from the 18th and 19th Manchesters arrived before dusk, and great relief was felt. They strengthened the line all along, but chiefly between the two sections of the Wiltshires, where the first company of Manchesters, which arrived earlier, had gone. A hectic night followed, during which no one had any rest. The Germans made most determined attacks repeatedly from the direction of the northern half of the wood. These attacks were nearly always preceded by bombs being thrown into our trenches from behind the trees, and sometimes the Germans managed to get very close, and were with difficulty beaten off. To prevent this a Lewis gun was placed a little way out in front of the line on a flank. But when visited a little later the gun and its team were found to have mysteriously disappeared. There is nothing so weird as fighting in a thick wood at night when half of it is occupied by the enemy. Captain Macnamara, the Second-in-Command, who had been kept back with the transport lines with other details in reserve, arrived at night and took command of the Battalion. Things were so busy at the time that he found it very difficult to get round the lines and examine the situation. Hostile shelling got much heavier and more accurate as dawn arrived, and more casualties were incurred. One of the wounded was the French interpreter attached to the Battalion, M. Pollitzer. Although he had no business there, he insisted on being in the front line, and in firing his revolver at the oncoming Huns during one of their attacks he was wounded by a hand grenade.

Still more reinforcement arrived at dawn, and men of the 90th Brigade came across the open and swept clear a little more of the northern half of the wood. It was then that the Wiltshires were ordered to withdraw and leave the situation in their hands. Very heavy shelling was going on at the time all round Trônes and Bernafay Woods' area, and the withdrawal had to be made piecemeal.

The Wiltshires' losses, in addition to those officers already mentioned, were 2/Lieutenants H. R.

Capt. Macnamara takes command.

July 9th.
Wiltshires
relieved.

Hicks, H. F. N. Powell and J. G. Frith, wounded, and the following other ranks:—28 killed, 186 wounded, and 14 missing.

Those that remained now dragged their tired bodies out of the front zone and made their way slowly across the rough ground until they had reached their old position, Gillson Street, which was now a comparatively quiet part. Here they assembled, and were joined by "A" Company, who had at the same time been relieved from their occupation of Maltz Horn Trench.

There is no doubt that the successes of the 2nd Wiltshire Regiment in their combined attacks on Trônes Wood and Maltz Horn Farm did much to assist the further advances that were made in this part of the Somme offensive. The Battalion was applauded by both British and French High Commands, and mentioned in the latter's "Order of the Day." For their conspicuous gallantry in these operations the following were awarded honours:—

Lieut.-Colonel Gillson: Distinguished Service Order, mentioned in despatches and Russian Order of St. Anne, Third Class, with swords.

Captain Ward: Distinguished Service Order and mentioned in despatches.

Lieutenant Shepherd: Military Cross and Italian Silver Medal.

Lieutenant Samut: Military Cross.

2/Lieutenant McWhannell, Military Cross.

2/Lieutenant Clay: Military Cross.

Company Sergeant-Major Waite: Military Cross.

Company Sergeant-Major Gough: Russian Medal of St. George, Second Class.

Sergeant Richens: Military Medal.

*Lance-Corporal H. W. Fox: Distinguished Conduct Medal.

*Lance-Corporal S. A. Merritt: Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Lance-Corporal F. Jackson: Military Medal.

Lance-Corporal T. Spence: Military Medal.

Lance-Corporal J. G. Whiting: Military Medal.

Lance-Corporal G. B. Whiting: Italian Bronze Medal.

*Private F. Dyke: Distinguished Conduct Medal.

*Private W. Luff: Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Private E. W. Missen : Military Medal.

Private C. Shaw : Military Medal.

Private E. Catt : Military Medal.

Private Read : Military Medal.

(Each of the four men marked * received the Distinguished Conduct Medal for repairing signal wires under fire. No praise can be too high for the conduct of the Battalion signallers during these operations. The heavy shell fire repeatedly cut the wires, and these signallers were constantly out in the open between companies and Headquarters, or Headquarters and Brigade, mending the wires and maintaining communication. Ignoring the dangers to which they were exposed, they carried out their duties with great determination, and were partly instrumental in defeating the enemy.)

Back to
Ploquigny.

After a few hours' rest at Gillson Street the Wiltshires marched from the battlefield, commencing a series of moves which occupied the days that followed. The first was to Copse Valley, south of the Peronne road, between Carnoy and Maricourt. After a day there under canvas they continued to Morlancourt, five miles west of Bray. There they started to reorganize, but moved again on the 13th to Vaux-sur-Somme. They found this village, where they had rested on their way up to the battle, full of cavalry. But these made room for them, and did all they could to help them to be comfortable. Here the XIII Corps Commander, General Congreve, paid the Wiltshires an informal visit and personally thanked them for what they had done in the Somme fighting. The next morning they entrained from Daours to Ailly-sur-Somme (with exception of transport, which went by road), and marched on to St. Pierre-a-Guoy, near Picquigny. They were left there for four days only, but having good billets and fine weather they were able to reorganize and shake off some of the ill-effects heavy fighting always has on a Battalion. On the fourth day they went back practically as they had come to their billets at Morlancourt. On the 20th they moved to Mansel Copse, south of Mametz, and sheltered under bivouacs on ground which, before July 1st, had been No Man's Land. This area was most interesting. Officers and men strolled about the deserted trenches which had been the scene of stationary warfare for so long, and examined the old Bosche dug-outs and heavy wire entanglements.

July 20th.
Return to battle
area.

They were able to study with ease the huge crater caused by the mining which had been going on between Mametz and Fricourt. The recent battles had left their traces behind, and the men did a fair amount of salvage and burial work. The fact that they built a number of their bivouacs with empty ammunition boxes gives an example of the amount of waste material that lay about.

On the evening of the 22nd the Wiltshires moved up to trenches on the scene of their recent battle. They were to be in reserve for an attack on Guillemont to be made the following morning by the 19th Manchesters. The 2nd Yorkshires were to assist by attacking, at the same time, some trenches on the left of the village round about a point called Waterlot Farm.

July 23rd.
An attack on
Guillemont.

On their way, whilst waiting for darkness to conceal their movements, the Wiltshires halted for a few hours at Glatz Redoubt. Continuing the march they had a very rough time on their way to their assembly trenches.

Either it was counter-battery work or intentional strafing of the roads; but in any case the Germans were very busy dropping heavy shells along the route the Battalion had to take. As usual, the roads were heavy with traffic, men, horses and wagons pressing forward and rearward, each with their urgent duty to perform. This, together with the darkness, made movement slow. The Wiltshires had casualties nearly all the way, but there was one particularly disastrous moment. Just as No. 12 Platoon got level with a stationary lorry, evidently loaded with explosives, a shell burst on the latter, and for a second, accompanied by a tremendous report, the whole country was lit up by a sheet of flame which mounted high into the air. The Platoon Commander, 2/Lieutenant Trench, was marching in front of his men, and was staggered, when the smoke cleared away, to find that only three of his command remained. Though not actually hit himself, the shock was so great that it was some weeks before Trench was himself again. All told, the Battalion lost forty-five men by the time they arrived at their destination.

Disaster to
No. 12 Platoon.

Companies had to make their own cover, and therefore commenced digging in as soon as they arrived. They were all below ground level before daylight. Parts of the Wiltshires' lines were under

fire during this work, but the casualties caused were very much fewer than on the march.

At dawn the Manchesters and the Yorkshires launched their attack. On an order from Brigade, Captain Macnamara dispatched "A" Company to support the former. The advancing battalions suffered heavily from the start, and the attack had not been long in progress before the German positions proved too strong for them. A very wide stretch of ground had to be crossed to reach the objective, and across this the men of the Manchesters and Yorkshires struggled to reach their enemy. But it was a losing game. The German machine gunners, snugly protected in their defences round the village of Guillemont, played havoc with the khaki lines from the moment they emerged from the cover of Trônes Wood. Both battalions' losses were so heavy as to make a final assault impossible. A few determined parties made bold attempts to rush part of the enemy's trenches, but only to be annihilated or captured. After some hours of brave struggle, the remnants withdrew under cover of the wood. The Wiltshires suffered but little during the attack, for neither was "A" Company called upon to leave Trônes Wood nor the remainder to leave their assembly positions. "A" Company was eventually sent back to join its Battalion, and, with the exception of very heavy shell fire all over the area, the rest of the day passed without event.

Back to Happy Valley.

That night the 21st Brigade was relieved by troops of the 35th Division, and the Wiltshires marched back to "Happy Valley," north-west of Bray. The march was uninterrupted, except when passing Talus Boise. Here a few shells fell in the Battalion's path, one unfortunately wounding Captain Whiting, commander of "B" Company, and Company Sergeant-Major Groves.

Arriving at "Happy Valley" they were allotted a part of a permanent camp where the 21st Brigade were being concentrated. Five days were spent there in excellent weather.

July 30th.

Another go at Guillemont.

It was decided that on the 30th the other two brigades in the Division should attempt to seize the same objectives that the 21st had failed to reach on the 23rd. The 2nd Wiltshires and the 18th King's Liverpool Regiment were ordered to move to a depression between Mametz and Carnoy, known as "Yorkshire Valley," in case their assistance should be wanted. But, though these brigades made their

attack with splendid dash and determination, their battalions met with no more success than those who had tried before them. Neither the Wiltshires nor the King's Liverpool Regiment were called upon, and both battalions returned to their tents in "Happy Valley" early on the following morning.

August 2nd.
30th Division
goes north.

On August 2nd the Division commenced to move north to quieter parts of the line, where they would relieve fresh troops, who in their turn would move south to carry on the offensive. This was being done by many divisions who had been attacking since July 1st.

The 21st Brigade entrained at Mericourt, and, halting for a day at Longpre, entrained again for Berguette, from whence they marched to Robecq, arriving on the evening of August 4th. The Wiltshires remained there for five days. Those who had been with the Battalion since 1915 were pleased to be back in an area they knew so well.

The Brigade was to take over the Givenchy sector, and advanced parties from each of the battalions left to make arrangements. The Wiltshires were detailed to relieve the 14th Hampshires in the front line.

August 11th.
Givenchy
trenches again.

Leaving Robecq on the 10th, and halting for a night at Essars, they moved into the trenches on the evening of the 11th. For a fortnight the Brigade remained in this sector, which was the same that it had held before the Loos battle. Two battalions held the front line, one was kept in support in ruined houses on the Le Plantin—Givenchy road, and the other in reserve at Gorre, which village also held Brigade Headquarters. The Battalion took its turn at each of these positions, changing every three days. Our men were battle-worn, and as to the Germans, they had drawn all the troops they could spare down to the south to defend their Somme front. Things were therefore quiet and casualties few. But, as usual in this sector, there was a certain amount of mining activity. The Huns blew one up on the left of the Wiltshires on August 20th, but little damage was done.

The Brigade was relieved on the 26th and went into divisional reserve. The Battalion marched out in the drenching rain to Mount Bernenchon, near Robecq, and arrived in the evening soaked to the skins. A week was spent in this peaceful village, and everyone enjoyed its restfulness. With the exception of a little training there was not a lot to

At Mount
Bernenchon.

be done. The Wiltshires held a great sports meeting on September 2nd, in the same field as the one they used for the same purpose a year before. The day was a perfect one and the ground in good condition. There were many events which interested the whole Brigade. There was great competition in the Inter-Battalion Relay Race, which was won by the Wiltshires. General Sir R. B. Haking, K.C.B., then commanding the First Army, Major-General J. S. Shea, C.B., D.S.O., and Brig.-General R. W. Morgan were present. "D" Company won the Battalion Championship.

Having enjoyed a week's real rest, the Wiltshires marched to Béthune, and, after a short stay there, returned to the Givenchy sector, where the Brigade was again taking over the line. The first position they went into was the support, and the daily programme consisted largely of doing carrying work for the front line battalions.

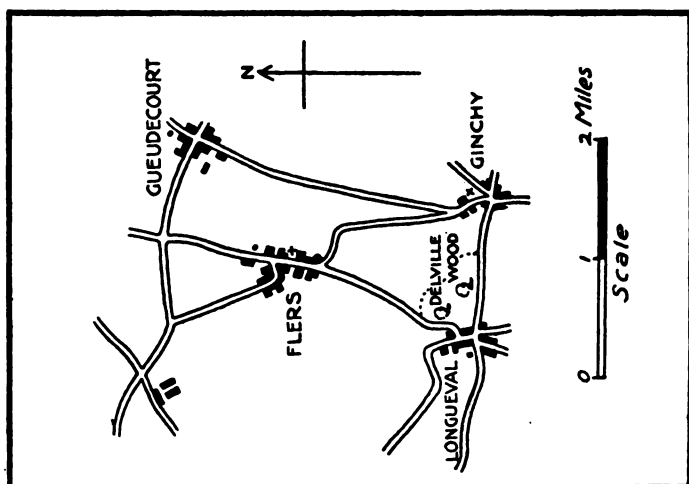
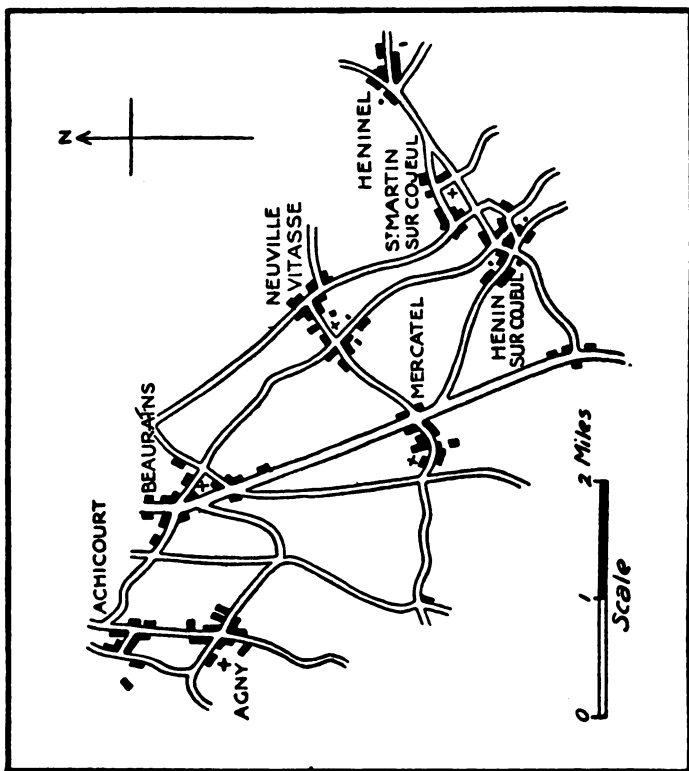
On the night of August 10th—11th they sent forward a patrol with the object of reconnoitring the Germans' position in rear of the high banks which surrounded the huge mine crater known as "Red Dragon." The party was ably led by 2/Lieutenant Martyn, and brought back some valuable information.

After three days the Wiltshires moved up to the front line, and so on, taking their turn in each of their positions as before.

Major Martin
assumes
command.

About this time some changes took place in the Battalion Headquarters. Major V. A. P. Martin returned and assumed command, Captain Macnamara becoming second-in-command. Lieutenant Shepherd left to join the 89th Brigade for staff instruction, and Lieutenant H. B. Jones took his place as Adjutant.

During its stay in the area the Battalion had considerably recuperated. A number of drafts arrived from time to time, and it was increasing in strength again. In the line things had been quite peaceful in comparison with the usual, and out of the line the rests had been real ones. There had been some good training, and the men were in fine spirits.



Witt R.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECOND PART OF THE SOMME—THE THIRD WINTER—THE BATTLE OF ARRAS.

THE 30th Division having been ordered to move again to the offensive front on the Somme, the Wiltshires entrained at Fouquereuil on September 18th. They arrived at Doullens and marched on to Amplier. The move south was made slowly. There was a two days' halt at Amplier and a fortnight at Naours. During these halts the most strenuous training was carried out, and practice attacks were frequently made over trenches dug for the purpose.

September 18th.
Move again to
Somme battle
front.

Continuing on October 4th, and after halting a day at Ribemont, where the whole Brigade was taken in buses, the Wiltshires marched to Pommiers Redoubt, east of Mametz, and bivouacked. The day after they arrived, the Divisional Commander, addressing them on parade, told them how the offensive had been going while they had been up north, and what was expected of them now that they had returned to take part in it again.

They spent five days at Pommiers, which gave them time for more training. But the condition of the ground after the many battles that had been fought over it made this difficult.

The 30th Division was preparing for an attack on German positions east of Flers, which village had recently been captured by other troops. This was to be a part of a general operation to be carried out on a wide front. The 89th and 90th Brigades were to do the assault on the front, for which the 30th Division was responsible, leaving the 21st Brigade in reserve. Beyond the usual preparations before going into the line, the Wiltshires, being with the reserve, did not have much to get ready.

The attack was to be launched on the 12th, and early on the previous day they were moved to "Switch" Trench, which was north-west of Longueval. Zero was not until 2 p.m., and the

October 12th.
An attack from
the Flers Sector.

whole of the morning our artillery rent the air with their bombardment. All that the Wiltshires did on the day of the attack was to move up to "Flers" Trench, which was near the village. Flers, by the way, was at this time nothing more than a name on the map. The concentration of artillery in these Somme battles was enormous, and the weight of shells in the previous fights had razed this poor little place to the ground. Even when close up to it one could only just make sure that a village had once existed there.

October 13th.

Wiltshires move
up to battle front
line.

The 21st Brigade took their place in the front line on the evening of the 13th. On that night the 2nd Wiltshires were ordered up to relieve the 17th King's Liverpool Regiment, who had suffered badly the previous day. The position was on the extreme left of the Brigade front, between a sunken road and a communication trench named "Goose Alley." "D" Company was put into support, the remainder all in front line trenches. The support line came in for most of the enemy's shelling.

After dark on the second night, "B" and "D" Companies moved into No Man's Land and dug a new trench well in front of the front line. The enterprise was successful, and carried out without a casualty. Each morning during the time the Wiltshires held their front the Germans bombarded the position with such severity that they expected a counter-attack, and prepared for it. None, however, developed, and on the night of the 15th—16th they were relieved by the 19th Manchesters and returned to Flers Trench. But here they were worse off than in the front line; the Huns had got the exact range of the trench, and put over heavy shelling day and night almost continuously. They suffered many casualties which were increased when one of the ration parties got caught in the open. They were glad when orders came on the 17th for them to return to the front line. This time "C" and "D" Companies were placed in front, with "A" in support and "B" in reserve. This was in order to be as near as possible in the right formation for an attack, which it was arranged the 21st Brigade should make on the following morning.

At Zero each company was to advance in two waves, with two platoons in each. Atrocious weather set in, and the men arrived in the line soaked to the skin. The drenching rain made movement tiring and most difficult. The trenches were in a

filthy condition, and as the attack was to take place so soon after the assembly the front companies formed up in shell holes outside and in front of the front line.

On the morning of Zero our artillery heavily bombarded the Huns' positions until 3.40 a.m., when, following a pre-arranged barrage, the 21st Brigade launched their attack. From the very beginning their progress was complicated and obscure. The unfortunate sudden failure of the weather affected operations from start to finish. It made movement so slow across the open fields that it gave the Germans time to consider carefully their defence. It also obstructed telephonic and other communications, and it was some time before the various headquarters in rear could tell the fate of the advancing companies. The Wiltshires' "C" and "D" Companies got as far as their objectives, but the number of their objectives and their exhausted condition caused the remainder to fail in the final assault. "A" Company, after advancing some distance, was held up by the enemy's barbed wire entanglements, and was eventually compelled to withdraw. "B" Company advanced but lost direction. They succeeded, however, in making a lodgment in a part of the Germans' front line, and twice pushed back their enemy by bombing their way up one of his communication trenches. But each time they were compelled to withdraw again owing to the shortage of bombs. Luckily they got into touch with some troops of the 26th Brigade (19th Division), and with their assistance captured the trench. Whilst they were consolidating their position, Captain V. H. Clay, the Company Commander, who had led them through the battle with a fine example of dash and bravery, was killed. The Battalion suffered heavily in officers and men right through, and the obscure situation gave Headquarters considerable anxiety. 2/Lieutenant Carrington was sent to find out how the companies had fared. But he did not return, and parties sent in search afterwards found no trace of him. 2/Lieutenant Sculley, also of Headquarters, tried to get into touch with the companies, but was buried by a shell on the way and taken to hospital.

Later it became known that on the whole the attack of the 21st Brigade had failed. The Wiltshires' casualties at that time amounted to 14 officers and 350 other ranks. What remained of the

October 18th.
21st Brigade
makes an attack
from the Fiers
Sector.

companies withdrew to the original British front line, which by that time had been severely dealt with by weather and shells and was in an appalling condition.

In the evening the 19th Manchesters came to the front and occupied the line on the right of the Wiltshires. The day following the attack the Germans strongly counter-attacked the 9th Division, and our trenches came under the heavy bombardment which preceded it. The Wiltshires gave the 9th Division every assistance, particularly in carrying bombs, of which that Division had a shortage. The enemy was successfully driven off.

October 21st.

Back to Pommiers Redoubt.

After dark on the same day the Manchesters took over the Wiltshires' front, and the depleted and very fatigued Companies moved back in slow stages. First to support, and then to a line known as "Cobham Trenches," they finally arrived at Pommiers Redoubt very early on the morning of the 21st. Everyone was exhausted, wet through and covered in mud from head to foot. Luckily the weather cleared, and, being left alone for the next two days, they were able to rest and clean up.

At the time many suggestions were put forward as to why the attack had failed. It had not been practised enough, some said; it was too rushed. Others put forward the bad weather as the reason, or that our artillery had not sufficiently flattened out the Hun beforehand. True there must have been a reason, and one or all of these contingencies no doubt had something to do with it. But it was never owing to lack of keenness or determination on the part of officers or men. But the odds were very much against them, and there was everything present to damp their spirits.

October 24th.

Division commences to move towards Arras.

They were glad to leave the scene behind them when, on the 24th, they marched off to Dernancourt. They arrived in the village late in the afternoon, and, though the billets were crowded, they were billets, and they were able to rest their aching bodies. But even here, though many miles from the front, they were not left entirely alone. The Germans, as though wanting to vent their wrath to the last, managed to reach the village with their long-range guns. They made two shoots on the village the day after the Battalion arrived, but, as on each occasion the men were marched out until it was over, no harm was done.

The Division now started to move to a fresh part

of the line. The Wiltshires were taken by bus, on the 26th, to Bouquemaison, where they halted for two days before marching on to Humbercourt. The weather broke up again, and the move was a cold and wet one. After a night at Humbercourt they marched into Berles-au-Bois and relieved the 1/5th South Staffordshires in defences round the village. The position was but a mile from the front line, and support to the sector that the Brigade was taking over.

The Berles-au-Bois sector lay between the Somme and Arras fronts. Here the Division took over the line, and, although the bad state of the trenches entailed an enormous amount of work, things were quiet, and the battalions, both in and out of the line, got a much-needed rest.

Only the 21st and 89th Brigades came into this area. The 90th Brigade was left behind to supply working parties for the Royal Engineers. The 89th Brigade went in on the right and the 21st on the left. The latter front faced Ransart and was held by two battalions in the line, one in support at Bailleulval, and one in reserve at Bailleulmont. Both villages had been badly knocked about.

The 2nd Wiltshires took their turn in the line with the 18th King's Liverpool Regiment, each doing seven days' trench tour and then to rest either at Bailleulval or Bailleulmont. Thus the Wiltshires embarked on their third winter of trench warfare. The Army in general had gained by experience, and the troops were better equipped to withstand the weather and keep their trenches in order. But it was hard work, nevertheless, and both British and Germans were kept so busy working on their defences that no heavy fighting took place. As far as the Wiltshires were concerned their biggest disturbance was on December 16th, when, after the enemy's wire had been cut with trench mortars, a small party of them made a feint raid on a German sap, followed by a bigger raid made by the Yorkshires, who were on the right. The Wiltshire party advanced to the sap, which they bombed, drawing a heavy barrage on their Battalion front. This enabled the Yorkshires to enter the enemy's trenches with practically no artillery opposition. The whole operation was most successful, and the Wiltshires' casualties amounted to two only, both slightly wounded. For this and subsequent good work Lieutenant Beavan was mentioned in

despatches and Sergeant Holdman awarded the Military Medal.

The object of these raids, which were continually being carried out by both sides, was usually to obtain an identification of the hostile troops opposite. It was very necessary that the Higher Command should know what enemy formations were holding the line, and a raid to capture prisoners was the best way to obtain the required information.

The periods out of the line were even busier than when holding trenches. Battalions at "rest" were continually called upon to supply working parties to repair damage done to the defences by rain, frost and snow. The "trench foot" trouble was always present during cold weather, as before. But elaborate precautions were taken, and the number of casualties from this malady were much reduced. Everything was done to keep the troops cheerful and fit. Regular baths, clean clothes, canteens, concert parties, recreation rooms, organized games, etc., all these had become well-managed and established institutions since the previous winter. Further, behind the divisional area, schools had been formed, where officers, non-commissioned officers and men were trained in all sorts of specialists' work and various degrees of leadership. Each battalion always had some of their number at these schools, where not only the instruction, but also the respite from the monotony of winter trench life, was most beneficial.

December 21st.
Lieut.-Colonel
Gillson assumes
command again.

Lieutenant-Colonel Gillson, having recovered from the wounds he received in the Somme fighting, returned to the Battalion and took over the command from Major Martin. The latter became Second-in-Command, and Captain Macnamara, after commanding a company for a month, was sent to be Second-in-Command of the 1/4th North Staffordshire Regiment. It was whilst serving with them that this officer, who had done so much for the Battalion during the short time he commanded it, was killed near Noeux-les-Mines, after being mentioned in despatches for gallantry.

Christmas and
New Year's
Days.

Christmas Day arrived, and at the time the Wiltshires were in the front line. On that day all arms were silent. The Battalion postponed its festivities until New Year's Day, when they were in Bailleulmont. An excellent dinner was there provided in the recreation room for the men, who lost no opportunity in taking full advantage of such a

change from their rough and rather monotonous fare. In the evening the sergeants held a dinner in the same room, which afforded excellent accommodation for such an occasion. A very fine concert ended the day, which everyone had thoroughly enjoyed.

1917.

On January 7th, 1917, the 49th Division appeared on the scene and commenced to relieve the 30th. On that day, the Wiltshires, whose place had been taken by the 7th West Yorkshires, marched to La Cauchie, about five miles, and billeted for the night. Early the following morning they moved on another twelve miles to a little village, Le Souich. This was a part of the area in which the Division settled for a fortnight or so, during which the companies were kept very busy wood-cutting in Lucheux Forest. A lot of training was also done to practise a new attack formation. But, in spite of this, time was found for recreation, of which football was the principal item. The sergeants played the officers on snow-covered ground and beat them. The officers also played, and beat, the officers of Brigade Headquarters, and, later, the officers of the 2nd Yorkshires.

January 7th.
30th Division
relieved and
moves rear-
ward.

On January 14th the Brigade was on ceremonial parade for the presentation of medal ribbons by the Divisional Commander. It was a very fine show, and the massed drummers of the Wiltshires, Yorkshires and Manchesters played during the proceedings. The following were those of the Battalion who were presented to the Divisional Commander on this occasion: Lieut.-Colonel R. M. T. Gillson, D.S.O., Captain C. W. Ward, D.S.O., Sergeant W. H. Smith, and Lance-Corporal H. Moore, for being mentioned in despatches. Captain W. S. Shepherd and Captain A. J. Samut were presented with Military Cross ribbons, and the following with the ribbon of the Military Medal: Sergeant A. E. Martin, Sergeant W. Snelgrove, Lance-Corporal J. G. Whiting, and 10496 Private Dobie.

In order to supply working parties for the Royal Engineers, who were constructing a railway track near Grenas, the Battalion moved to that village, a

January 22nd.
Move to Grenas.

distance of six miles, on the afternoon of January 22nd. The billets were bad, and the men were crowded together in the few barns that were able to accommodate them. Luckily the weather was fine. Working on the track under the Royal Engineers' direction was the daily routine for the fortnight which followed. Life at Grenas was rather monotonous, and nothing in particular occurred whilst they were there.

February 6th.
Commence to
move to the line
again.

At the end of the fortnight the Division moved to take over a sector south of Arras. The Wiltshires set out on the march again, and on the first day reached Simencourt, where they halted for the night. The next day's march brought them to Arras late in the afternoon, and, though the buildings were very much shattered, they found more comfortable billets than those they had left behind at Grenas. This was lucky, as no movement was allowed in the town during daylight and they were confined a great deal to their quarters.

The old town of Arras had been close to the line during most of the war. Not a house had escaped the merciless enemy gunners. Most buildings were wrecked completely, and many levelled to the ground. But at the time the Wiltshires entered the Huns had been leaving it alone as long as, from their aeroplanes and balloons, they could see no movement in the streets. By day the town had an atmosphere of deathly silence and desolation. The few whose duties compelled them to walk out in the hours of daylight moved stealthily in single file under cover of the walls that remained. But by night Arras went to the other extreme and became as busy as a bee hive. Men came out of their holes for exercise, if for nothing else, and all sorts of vehicles moving in both directions crossed the town by the main roads. By night Arras was busier than it had been in its peaceful pre-war days.

February 13th.
Taking over the
line south of
Arras.

The Wiltshires sent out large working parties daily, digging trenches round about Achicourt, a little village about a mile south. On February 13th "A" and "D" Companies exchanged billets with two companies of the 19th Manchesters, who were at Achicourt in reserve to their Battalion, which was holding the line a little way off, due east. "B" and "C" Companies and Headquarters took these billets over the next day, when "A" and "D" moved up to the line and relieved the rest of the Manchesters. The Battalion manned these trenches

for ten days, during which the companies interchanged their positions at intervals. The sector was a quiet one, and except for considerable rifle grenade firing at times the tour was uneventful. When the Manchesters returned and took over once more the Wiltshires did not immediately leave Achicourt, but remained a few days, digging a Corps cable trench. They marched to Berneville on the 27th, but still continued to work daily on the same job.

March 4th saw them back again in Arras, and heavy snow began to fall. A change was made in Brigade Command, and during the time which elapsed between the departure of Brig.-General J. Ponsonby, C.M.G., D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel Gillson commanded the Brigade. Captain A. J. Samut commanded the Battalion during the latter's absence, Major Martin having been sent to hospital. Captain W. S. Shepherd returned to the Battalion the same day as Colonel Gillson, and became Second-in-Command.

Taking over from the Yorkshires on the 10th, the Battalion was in the line for four days, this time just east of Agny, south of the part they held before. Two or three casualties were caused by shells to a carrying party taking hot food up to the front trenches, but things were quiet otherwise and the tour was uneventful. After this they went to Berneville, being relieved by the King's Liverpool Regiment. They had not left the trenches long when they heard that the Germans were giving up their positions and withdrawing. They were sadly disappointed at having just missed a grand opportunity for giving chase to the Hun. Later news told how the Germans were going well back, and how our front lines were following up with all speed. All were eager to be sent up to join in the pursuit. It seemed hard to be denied the pleasure of running after the enemy after so many monotonous weeks of stationary warfare. Orders were to be in readiness to move at a moment's notice, but the Wiltshires were not called upon. Instead, they were moved in the opposite direction, and marched back to Grenas on the 19th.

March 13th.
Move back to
Berneville.

German
withdrawal.

They spent a few days at Grenas, training in conjunction with the Divisional School, and a few at Bailleulmont. Then returning to the line again they moved via Blairville, where they bivouacked for a night in a quarry.

Back to the line
after short rest.

The Germans having fallen back some distance in

March 28th.
Taking over the
new Mercatel
Sector.

their plans to stand on their famous Hindenburg line, the Wiltshires had a good way to march before they reached the British front trenches. Their orders were to relieve the Royal Scots Fusiliers in the new sector which ran through the eastern outskirts of Mercatel. To get there they had to cross ground which had been evacuated, and they were much interested by what the Germans had left behind. Mercatel was a little village, or, rather, the remains of one, south of Arras, and about three miles east of the original front line. The Wiltshires took over the line, which ran roughly along the Mercatel—Boisleux road, on the 28th. As they expected for one so freshly acquired, it was little more than a single ditch, and had no communication trenches leading to the rear. It was a most primitive defence, but, luckily, the Germans having gone well back, and what was now No Man's Land, being many hundred yards wide, it was possible, with caution, to approach the front line in daylight. In fact, the enemy was so far away that men could go singly well out in front and explore. But the 2nd Wiltshires being famous diggers they commenced as soon as relief was complete to dig a fresh and better line 400 yards in advance of the one they had taken over, and had got it far enough advanced to occupy the first morning after they had come into the line. This was chiefly the work of "C" and "D," who were the front companies. On the second day "A" Company, which was in reserve, completed a communication trench from the old line to the new. All companies worked hard on the position they had created to make a good defence of it. Their task proceeded without disturbance until the day before they were relieved. On this day the Yorkshires and the Manchesters, on the right of the Wiltshires, were ordered to advance and seize the village of Henin-sur-Cojeul. The two Battalions made the assault in the early hours of the morning, and were successful in making an entry into the village. But they met with a great deal of opposition, and were at first unable to clear the Germans from all the buildings. About 9 a.m. Colonel Gillson received orders to send one of his Companies in support of the operation. "B" was detailed and despatched to report to and take the orders of Colonel Edwards, who commanded the 2nd Yorkshires. Henin was finally cleared of the enemy, and by nightfall troops of the 90th Brigade

April 2nd.
An attack on
Henin.

arrived and took over the captured positions from the 21st. The following evening the Wiltshires marched to Bailleulval, after they had handed over the line again to the Royal Scots Fusiliers. They had had very few casualties during their tour, and "B" Company, in their expedition to assist in the attack on Henin, had had but one.

April 3rd.
Back to Bailleul-
val.

The Germans had made their withdrawal for the purpose of shortening their line which had been bent, and therefore lengthened by our repeated attacks on the Somme battle front. By this time it was apparent that they had given up all the ground they intended to, and that they had settled on their carefully prepared and highly organized defences known as the Hindenburg Line. As had been made known lately, there was at this time considerable discussion between British and French High Commands with regard to the situation and plans of action. It was decided to make a general attack on the Germans' Hindenburg Line on April 9th. The 21st Brigade, which, as part of the 30th Division, was to be in the front rank of the attack, detailed the 2nd Wiltshires and the 18th King's Liverpool Regiment as its assaulting troops on the right and left respectively.

Only a very short stay was made at Bailleulval, two days only being available to practise the attack. When they marched out of the village at mid-day on the 7th, however, they were fit for the fight and in excellent spirits. They halted under a Crucifix in a sunken road at Wailly, where they had tea, and were issued with all their cumbersome equipment for the attack. At dusk they continued their march to front trenches east of Mercatel to relieve the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers and the 17th Manchesters. "A" and "B" Companies took over the line of outposts, and "C" and "D" some support trenches in the rear.

Back to the line
for an attack on
Hindenburg Line

The next day was spent in preparation whilst our artillery bombarded the enemy lines and practised barrages. Excellent weather prevailed, and there was fine observation. After dark Battalion Headquarters moved up to their battle position in a sunken road south of Mercatel. Here they were joined by sections of the machine gun company and trench mortar battery, and also 120 men from another battalion as "cleaners." All these, who were to be attached to the Battalion during the attack, were guided to their various assembly

positions. By 11.30 p.m. every one was in his rightful positions for Zero. Then, faithful to the traditional bad luck that the British so often had in the way of weather, heavy rain began to fall.

A brave attack
on a German
machine-gun
position.

It had been planned, as a preliminary to the attack, that a party should set out some time before Zero and seize a mill, situated near the Henin—Neuville-Vitasse road. This mill was one of the salient obstacles to the main attack. Lieutenant Frisby and a hundred men of "D" Company were detailed for this task, and they started off soon after midnight. It was known that the Germans had at least one active machine gun in the ruins of this mill, but the actual strength of the garrison there was uncertain. It was not until Lieutenant Frisby's men drew near the position that it was realized that his force was insufficient to deal with such a strong enemy feature. The party made great efforts to expel the Hun, but met an overwhelming resistance. When their number had been reduced by half, their leader badly wounded, and his brother officer (Lieutenant S. R. Parsons) killed, the remainder were compelled to cease their onslaught. Realizing that their task was impossible, they withdrew, covered by a platoon which Lieutenant Barne had brought forward to their aid. Later it was ascertained from prisoners that the mill contained two machine guns and teams, and a hundred and twenty riflemen.

April 9th.
Main attack
opens.

The main attack was launched at 5.30 a.m. Owing, however, to the conformation of the enemy's defences, orders were for the 21st Brigade to stand fast until the two villages on the flanks of their objectives, viz., St. Martin and Neuville-Vitasse, had been captured by the brigade on their right and left. The attack progressed favourably, and the two villages were cleared of the enemy. At 11.30 a.m. the 2nd Wiltshires on the right and the 18th King's Liverpool Regiment on the left, with the 19th Manchesters in rear in support, left their positions and went "over the top." The principal known difficulty was the long distance between the "jumping-off" positions and the objective. The attacking waves had about two thousand yards to cover before making the actual charge on the Hindenburg Line. The ground was rough and hard going, flat, and practically without cover.

The Wiltshires made the first part of the move in artillery formation, with "A" Company on the

right and " B " on the left as the first wave, and " C " on the right and " D " on the left as the second. The lie of the ground gave excellent hostile observation, and from the start the advancing line underwent heavy shelling, which steadily increased as they neared their objective, and caused a great number of casualties. Before the attackers covered half the distance their ranks were considerably thinned. In order to reach the Hindenburg Line, two sunken roads had to be crossed. At each of these the Germans had strong outposts with machine guns, which put up considerable resistance and added to our casualties. The first caused the least trouble of the two, and from it a machine gun and several prisoners fell into our hands. On nearing the second, opposition became intense. Many German machine guns, from the safe cover of the sunken road, played freely on the forward lines of our men, and this fire, together with the enemy's shelling, created almost an impenetrable barrage. Though the advance was continued, it was but a handful of men, in comparison with the number that started, that passed that sunken road. Those that were still unhit, though exhausted, went doggedly on, while their comrades were still falling all round them. But the crux was when the few survivors of this terrible journey reached, at last, the enemy's wire entanglements in front of the objective. It was found to be undamaged by our artillery, and impassable. Oh! the irony of it! Here, under their very noses, after having survived perhaps the greatest ordeal of their lives, was the great Hindenburg Line which they had set out to seize! But the strong uncut wire entanglement which separated them from their goal was some yards deep, and it was a thin, exhausted, straggling line of Britishers that confronted it. To make a charge was unthinkable. Such thoughts as these were momentary, for behind this wire wall, safely covered by carefully prepared defences, the Germans stood dealing death all along our line. In a flash our men could see the hopelessness of their quest. There was nothing for it but to get as near to the objective as possible and drop at once into the nearest hole or cover to get out of the Huns' murderous fire.

Uncut enemy
entanglements

Thus a thin, ragged line of tired men established itself along the outside of the Germans' wire entanglement. But the enemy still held his Hindenburg Line, and his close proximity to our

men, who were practically without cover, was dangerous. It was decided to withdraw to the sunken road that ran between Neuville-Vitasse and St. Martin-sur-Cojeul. This movement was carried out successfully, in spite of its many difficulties, and the new position gave the Battalion a better chance to hold the ground they had gained. Our men at once began to dig themselves in on the east side of the road, under cover of the bank. But the Germans appeared to have the exact range of all landmarks in the territory they had evacuated, for they very soon commenced an accurate fire with their heavy artillery on the road, and before long the attacking force of the Battalion was reduced to 3 officers and 90 other ranks. These officers at once organized their small band, so that in the event of the enemy counter-attacking they could make the best possible fight. Shortly, however, two companies of the 19th Manchesters arrived on the scene to reinforce, and dug in alongside the Wiltshires. The position was thus held until the evening, when the 16th Manchesters came up and took over the position.

The remnants of the 2nd Wiltshires were then able to retire from their precarious position. They were thoroughly exhausted, but they did not feel the full weight of their weariness until they had been relieved of the responsibility for the defence of the line. Their total casualties for the battle were 14 officers and 320 other ranks. The worst part of this battle was that towards the end of the day heavy snow began to fall, and continued throughout the night. The ground, where so many of our wounded lay, soon became covered in frozen slush, and many of the men who would, under more favourable conditions, have been saved died of exposure and exhaustion. The large area covered by the operation and the enormously heavy casualties made it impossible for the stretcher-bearers to clear the battlefield with sufficient speed to rescue all the badly wounded from the effects of the snow. Learning this, the Battalion's few survivors who were resting at "Swich Lane," a trench in the rear, at once forgot their fatigue, formed a volunteer party, which went out again that night back to the ground over which they had fought, and rescued many of their ill-fated comrades. Not many of the survivors will ever forget Easter Monday Bank Holiday, 1917.

On the evening of the 11th the Wiltshires marched

back to rest billets. On the way they were joined by their transport, stores, surplus, personnel, etc., and after halting awhile at Bailleulval they marched on to Berles-au-Bois, their destination. For a few days they were left here to themselves enjoying a much-needed rest. Reorganization was seen to, and their fighting strength was increased by the arrival of drafts, returned working parties, etc.

April 11th.
Moving out of
the battle for
rest.

In the meantime, the Germans made a further withdrawal on this front, and the Wiltshires got orders to march forward again and occupy some old dug-outs at Neuville-Vitasse, leaving their transport, etc., at Achicourt on the way. For three days they were not called upon. Whilst there their fighting number was again increased by the arrival of another draft from the base.

The 21st Brigade was to carry out another operation, and on April 23rd, after Colonel Gillson had explained the scheme to his officers, the men were once more issued with battle equipment. "A" Company was dispatched to garrison strong points south-west of Heninel; "B" and "C" to report to the Royal Engineers company for carrying purposes. "D" Company, with Headquarters, moved to the Hindenburg Line south of Heninel, where they were to be in support and work in conjunction with the 2nd Yorkshire Regiment. Early that evening the latter detachment of the Battalion made their way to positions which had been used by the 90th Brigade as "jumping-off" trenches for an attack they had made that morning. "D" Company's task was to establish communication between the 21st Brigade's right and the 33rd Division. Headquarters and "D" Company remained in the position for the night, during which they were joined by "B" and "C", who had finished their carrying work. The three companies formed a defensive line, and got into touch with the 1st Middlesex and 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers on the right and the 18th Manchesters on the left. Early the next morning they saw the Yorkshires commence to advance in a north-east direction, and soon afterwards observed parties of Germans moving from the south-west corner of Vis-en-Artois. This intelligence was at once passed on to Brigade Headquarters, and as a result the Wiltshires were ordered to advance in support of the Yorkshires. "C" and "D" Companies led off in artillery formation, followed by "B" and Headquarters.

April 24th.
21st Brigade
makes a fresh
attack.

They came under a considerable barrage, which caused a number of casualties. But this did not hold their advance, which was continued until the Heninel—Cherisy road was reached. Here the Battalion halted, digging in astride the road. After dark they were ordered to take up a position between the 33rd Division and the 18th King's Liverpool Regiment, and again commenced digging in. Their task this time, however, was shortened by the existence of a cable trench, which happened to be in the right position and saved a lot of spade work. The night was quiet, but just before the dawn the Germans commenced to shell the position heavily. This developed to a bombardment, which, by its severity, led everyone to believe that a strong counter-attack was imminent. All precautions were taken, and everyone was ready for such an event, but it did not materialize. Our casualties in this shelling were considerably lighter than they might have been owing to the fact that in digging their trenches the companies had made narrow slits leading off the main defences. The men took shelter in these during the bombardment, and whilst they afforded good protection careful watch could be kept over No Man's Land, and fire could have been opened at once if any of the enemy had appeared on the horizon.

During the rest of that day, and the two which followed, nothing special occurred. The Wiltshires continued to hold their position, and every now and again had to submit to heavy artillery shoots from the enemy, to which our guns replied. "A" Company rejoined, and the four companies were together once again.

At dawn on the 28th, in conjunction with an attack made by the First Army on the right, our artillery put down a heavy creeping barrage opposite the line held by the 21st Brigade. This was gradually shifted on to the enemy's front, then in rear of it, then back on to his trenches again, thus making him believe an attack was coming. As a result of this the Germans replied with a heavy barrage on the Wiltshires' position, and heavily shelled the latter for the remainder of the day. This caused many casualties, and the men were not sorry when, being relieved about midnight by the 6th Northamptonshires, they were able to march away. Making a brief halt at Neuville-Vitasse, and another for breakfast at Achicourt, they marched to Arras,

and were joined by their transport, etc. Entraining at Arras station, which, though still frequently shelled, was luckily quiet at the time, they were taken to Petit Houvin, from whence they marched to Bunville, arriving and going into billets at about 8.30 p.m.

It was never the intention of the Higher Command to push home the attack in their particular sector, and practically no reserves were behind the 30th Division. The attack was extraordinarily successful in those places where reserves were available to confirm and exploit the success gained by the leading troops, and a wide gap was made in the enemy's defensive system. Had the situation been realized and full advantage taken of it by sending forward mobile troops, the Battle of Arras might have produced far-reaching results. The manner in which the men of this Battalion pressed on, under a devastating fire, right up to the enemy's wire, was beyond all praise, and to find it uncut and impassable was a poor reward for such gallantry.

April 29th.
By train to back
area for a rest.

The Wiltshires had done their share of the fighting in the Battle of Arras, and, though the latter had not been entirely successful, the cause was not in the Battalion's power to obviate, and was in no way due to any lack of determination on the part of its officers and men. They had thrown themselves into the battle with the keenest spirit, which lasted throughout. But they had lost heavily, and badly needed rest and re-equipment. It was a joy for all to see once again green fields unbroken by shells, and to be in peaceful surroundings.

CHAPTER VIII.

BACK TO YPRES.

AFTER four restful days at Bunville, the 2nd Wiltshires were moved to Blangermont and Blangerval. At Blangermont
and Blangerval. These were two adjacent villages, each consisting of a single straggling row of buildings on either side of the same main road. They were, nevertheless, picturesque, one being high up on a hill and the other in the valley, as their names imply. The weather steadily improved and heralded the passing of the dread winter, one which had been particularly brutal, especially at its finish, which will never be forgotten by those who took part in the Arras battle. It was exhilarating to feel the warmth of the summer returning.

The first few days of this rest were marked by the Battalion coming into contact with its old and respected associate, Lieut.-General H. E. Watts, C.B., C.M.G., the original commander of the 21st Brigade, who had been so popular with all ranks in the early part of the campaign, both as Brigadier and Divisional Commander. He was now commanding the Corps to which the 30th Division had come for the time being. General Watts paid an informal visit to the Battalion while it rested at Bunville, and later he inspected the whole Brigade on parade. The old hands were delighted to see him again, and he conversed cheerfully with his many old friends as he passed down the ranks.

The Wiltshires took full advantage of the rest afforded them, and, with the exception of daily exercise in the way of route marching and training, the men were left a great deal to their own leisure.

A move was made on May 15th to Vieil Hesdin, May 15th.
Move to Vieil
Hesdin. where billets were a distinct improvement on those in the last villages, and the surrounding country gave even greater facilities for recreation. They were perhaps the best billets the Wiltshires had encountered in their travels in France. The comfort of officers and men alike was well provided for. Particularly was this the case with Headquarters,

who were received with great hospitality at the Château Forestel. The way in which M. de Rocquigny entertained them made them feel that war was, after all, quite enjoyable.

The daily programme here was more strenuous. Each day the Battalion had to march a good way to a prepared manœuvre ground to take part in big Brigade attack practices, which occupied most of the hours of daylight. Time, however, was found to train for the Brigade sports, which were held at Wail on the 19th. The Wiltshires, as usual, won the tug-of-war, and also distinguished themselves in other events.

May 20th.

Long march to
the north.

The Division left the area on May 20th, and commenced to move to the northern battle front, near Ypres. The whole move was done on foot, in stages. The Battalion marched with their transport, via Oeuf, Predifin, Febvin'Palfart, Neurpre, Borre and Steenvoorde, halting for the night at each place, except the last named, where they had three days' rest. The regularity with which the march was carried out did everybody good. From Steenvoorde they went on to Brandhoek, situated between Ypres and Poperinghe. Here they went into huts and under canvas in a part of a large camp which was allotted to them, and which, with the rest of the 21st Brigade, was to be their station for a fortnight or so. The daily strenuous exercise that officers and men had had on the open road during the march, which was made in the best of weather, made them sunburnt and happy, and they looked the height of fitness as they moved about the camp. The usual programme of training was carried out, though it was restricted owing to limited space.

In camp behind
Ypres.

Soon after arrival, 4 officers and 151 other ranks were ordered away to assist the Canadian Tunnellers in large mining operations which were being carried out near Messines in connection with a big offensive that was about to take place. It was for this offensive that the 30th Division had been brought up to the north, though for the first part it was to be in reserve.

Towards the end of their stay at Brandhoek the companies were all occupied in supplying working parties; one of these, on June 11th, suffered a few casualties from gas shelling.

On June 14th they struck camp and moved, via Ouderdom, to "Palace" Camp, near Dickebusch, a distance of about six miles, where they repitched

their tents. The daily programme, however, was not much altered, and the call on the Battalion for large working parties continued.

The Wiltshires commenced to move towards the front line trenches on June 20th by marching some three miles, via Kruistraathoeck, to Château Segard, where they occupied a reserve line. Here they parted from their transport, which was moved to "Ottawa" Camp, near Ouderdom. On the same day the weather, which except for intense heat had been all that could be wished for, broke up, and rain set in. This was always a serious matter around Ypres, where the ground was so cut up with years of heavy shell fire that it was difficult to move along the mud tracks which wound their way in and out of ancient and modern shell holes.

June 20th.
A short spell in
"The Salient."

After dark on the following day, having sent reconnoitring parties ahead, the Wiltshires left their trenches at Château Segard, which were taken over by the Yorkshires, and made their way to the front line, relieving the 16th Manchesters in a sector east of Zillebeke Lake. This being the most famous part of the British line in Flanders, the names of the trenches occupied by the companies in their dispositions will no doubt be familiar. "D" Company held the front line, "Waddington Avenue." Three platoons of "C" were in local reserve at "Ritz Street." Three platoons of "B" were in support at "Wellington Crescent." "A" was in reserve at "Zillebeke Bund." One platoon from each of "B" and "C" Companies was left at Château Segard.

The Battalion held this sector of the line for eight days. There was a fair amount of shelling from both sides, as was nearly always the case in the "Salient," but on the whole the Germans were quiet, and the tour was much the same in routine as many another the Battalion had done. Information as to what Regiment of Germans occupied the opposite trenches was badly needed, and, with the object of obtaining it, a patrol went out every night scouring No Man's Land and making efforts to enter the Huns' line. But there were many difficulties. The nights were very dark and the ground was congested with old trenches, barbed wire and many other obstacles. Nor was it easy to encounter the enemy in the open, as his patrols were not active.

On June 27th, ordinary patrolling having failed to produce what was wanted, 2/Lieutenants H. C. Clark

and W. G. Field took out a strong party and carried out a small scheme to approach the enemy's line. This little operation, which practically amounted to a raid, was very skilfully carried out, with no artillery assistance, its sole object being to obtain, dead or alive, some identification of the enemy regiment which opposed them. The men of the party were keen for success, and the two officers led them with boldness and determination. The Germans made considerable efforts to frustrate them, and there was some hand-to-hand fighting. Our party, however, got the better of their opponents, killing three with the bayonet and wounding the remainder. No prisoners were taken, but examination of the uniform of one of the dead gave away the required information. On returning, the officers were able to report that the Germans across the way were the 46th R.I.R. The party had some difficulty in regaining the British lines, as the disturbance they had caused in the enemy's trenches soon fetched up numbers of Huns from other parts of the line. They had to recross No Man's Land under a fusillade of rifle fire and bombs, but fortunately suffered no serious loss.

June 28th.
Move to
St. Omer.

On the night of the 28th/29th, immediately after relief by the King's Liverpool Regiment, the Wiltshires were taken from the trenches direct to St. Omer, halting for a few hours only at Dickebusch huts before entraining at Reninghelst. The whole Brigade was moving up to the St. Omer region, and the train also carried the Manchesters, Machine Gun Company, and Brigade Headquarters. The 2nd Wiltshires detrained at Watten, north of St. Omer, and marched to billets at La Panne, north-east of Tournehem. The life there was similar to that at Blangerval and Hesdin. Training took up most of the day, especially when the whole Division practised together an attack which they were to carry out when they returned to the line again. But recreation, which, after all, was as good for the men as the training, was not forgotten. Both the Wiltshires and the Yorkshires held sports meetings, each of which were splendid affairs. At the former, which was held on July 14th, "B" Company was once again declared champion. Also, the Division held a horse show and gymkhana, near Nordausques. In this, Colonel Gillson and Captain H. B. Jones obtained prizes in two separate events. Good weather prevailed, the billets were excellent, and

At La Panne.

altogether the Division had a very enjoyable rest. The men looked as fit as possible when they set out on their way to the line once more.

The Wiltshires left La Panne on July 18th, going in buses as far as Steenvoorde, whence they marched to a spot near Abeele and bivouacked. A five days' halt was made here, during which the Brigade was visited by the Archbishop of York, who gave an address to the officers and men.

Moving back to the line.

The Battalion was then moved up to "Palace" Camp, near Ouderdom, late on the evening of the 24th, and again halted for four days. These moves were all part of a plan to get the units into their right places whilst preparations were being made for the attack in which the Division was to take part, and for which it had been practising. Our artillery had commenced their preparatory activity and the Germans made strong retaliation. The Wiltshires came in for their full share of this when, on the night of the 28th, they moved to their first assembly trenches, Ritz Street, Kite Street, and Normand Street. These positions were east of Dickebusch, where they left their transport. "B" Company in particular had several casualties from the enemy's shelling on the 29th and 30th, which were "X" and "Y" days. Late in the latter day, the eve of the attack, the companies moved up to their jumping-off positions in Cross Trench, Vancouver Avenue, and Grab Street. The move was somewhat interrupted by a hostile barrage which lasted half an hour and seriously affected some of the positions. Very active machine-gun fire also interfered with the assembling, and the companies were not finally settled in their positions until well after midnight. This was a serious matter, as Zero had been fixed at 3.40 a.m. It had hardly commenced to get light when that time arrived.

July 28th.
Assembling for another Ypres attack.

The 2nd Wiltshire Regiment, with the Yorkshires on their right, were the leading battalions of the Brigade, and were detailed to capture a line running through a point known as "Stirling Castle." The 18th King's Liverpool Regiment and the 19th Manchester Regiment were then to pass through and capture a further objective.

July 31st.
Opening of the Third Battle of Ypres.

The first wave, which as far as the Battalion was concerned consisted of three platoons of "B" Company, set out at once in line with battalions on both flanks and advanced on the enemy. This was done under the cover of a creeping barrage, and the

Germans at once retaliated with a bombardment of our front line. The first wave of attackers were lucky in getting clear of this just in time. The Huns made a stiff resistance with machine guns, but they were mostly directed to the right of the Wiltshires' attacking front. They hindered the Yorkshires, however, who were advancing on that flank. By 6.15 both battalions had been successful in overcoming opposition and in taking their objectives. "B" Company took forty prisoners and "cleaned up" the enemy's position known as "Jam Support," "Jeffery Trench," and "Jeffery Support." Three platoons of "C" Company followed up closely and killed a number of Germans in "Jam Row" and "Jam Lane," but they took no prisoners. "A" Company, advancing with two platoons of "D," met with more opposition. From the cover of some woods west of Dumbarton Lakes, and some trees at a point known as "Inverness Copse," on the Menin Road, the Germans were able to cause them considerable casualties. They went doggedly on, however, and not only made progress but took several prisoners. They consolidated the positions they had taken, and, in addition, made some good "strong points." A small party holding one of these, and having, by nature of their position, a good fire command of their enemy, strengthened their defence and did the enemy a considerable amount of damage by getting into action some Lewis guns which they took from a derelict tank close by.

At 9.30 Battalion Headquarters moved forward and established themselves in "Jam Lane." The remainder of the day was taken up in consolidating the positions won. To take a position was but half the task; in many cases it was just as difficult to keep it. At such times there were only two jobs—to dig, or do sentry go. Those who dug, dug furiously, for every minute lost was a point in favour of the Germans taking the trench again, should they have a mind to do so. Those on sentry were equally important, for the diggers must at once become shooters if any Germans were seen advancing. There was an alarm just after midday, as the Germans were seen massing near Dumbarton Lakes. But except for some wild shooting by their artillery there was no further hostile action, and that day and night passed without a counter-attack developing.

The Wiltshires held the ground they had taken for the next three days, the first three days of August. They were uneventful, except for heavy shelling on both sides, especially on August 1st, when "A" Company in particular suffered. Good spade work was done during these three days, and when they were relieved by the 7th Buffs they handed over a position to be proud of.

August 3rd.
Relieved from
the battle front.

After the battle the companies made their way to Château Segard, where they rallied in the early hours of the morning of the 4th for a brief rest. At midday buses took the Battalion once more into peaceful country, landing them at Eecke, where they spent two days cleaning up. Following this, there was a three days' halt at Moolenacher, west of Bailleul, and from there, on August 11th, they proceeded to Inkerman Camp, at Mont Vidaigne, near Locre. These rests were much the same as others had been; a good deal of training was done, and the Battalion made a fine show when they paraded for inspection by General Plumer, in whose Army they were at the time.

August 11th.
Resting near
Locre.

The 21st Brigade returned to the line on August 21st. The Wiltshires were taken in buses that evening to a point just outside Kemmel, and from there marched to some trenches in the Messines sector, in reserve, leaving their transport at Lindenhoeck. They continued the following evening to the front line, and relieved the 45th Australian Battalion.

"A" and "B" Companies occupied the front line on the left and right respectively; "C" behind "A," and "D" behind "B," took up positions in support just in rear. Further in rear was Headquarters, which was fixed up in an old German field battery position. Being on newly-captured ground the line taken over was, as expected, in a very primitive state. The support line had been dug comparatively well, but the front line consisted of a series of shell holes only partly fortified and not linked up. There was a lot of work needed, and once again the Wiltshiremen got down to it. But, owing to the lie of the ground, the bulk of the work had to be done by night only. It was whilst this work was in progress, just before dawn on the 24th, one of the men lost his bearings. He ran into four Germans and was promptly made prisoner. But unfortunately for these Huns, who evidently thought they had made an easy capture, they also

August 22nd.
The Messines
Sector.

lost their way, and very kindly walked our man back into our lines. The Wiltshire sentries promptly rescued their comrade and secured the amazed Germans, with the exception of one who managed to get away during the small scrap that ensued. Thus the Battalion gained an easy identification (the 133rd R.I.R.) and the prisoners taken gave our Intelligence important information.

On the night of the 25th they had the misfortune to lose Captain W. B. Wood, who had so ably commanded "A" Company. The night was a quiet one, but a chance shot from a German sniper killed this gallant officer while he was supervising the erection of wire entanglements in front of his position. Only a few days before he had been awarded the Military Cross for bravery in the recent fighting.

August 26th.
Wiltshires'
position raided.

After dark on the 26th about sixty of the enemy raided "A" Company's front and made a determined effort to get an identification. The men of "A" Company, however, were too much for them; they were beaten off, leaving several of their number lying dead in front of our trenches. And so, for the second time in three days, the Germans gave the Wiltshires the kind of information they themselves were seeking. The clothing of their dead revealed them to belong to the storm troops of the 179th I.R.

Evidently angered at their failures, the Huns made a much more determined raid on the night of the 30th, this time going for "D" Company's front on the right. Matters were complicated owing to it being relief night, and the Wiltshires had got ready to hand over to the 19th Manchesters, whose arrival was being awaited just as the Germans made their appearance. The raid was backed up by an intensive barrage on our front line. "D" Company put up a stiff resistance, and did some fine work with their Lewis guns. But by dint of much shelling and machine-gun support, the enemy was successful in penetrating some of our outposts. The fight was a severe one while it lasted, and the men of "D" Company were eventually successful in ridding themselves of their assailants. But when things were quiet again our losses were found to be Private Bull, who fought his gun till killed by a German revolver bullet, 14 wounded and 9 taken prisoner. The latter were reduced to eight when one man managed to escape whilst being escorted

across No Man's Land. The Germans, however, had to pay for their success, many falling to our Lewis guns. From these it was discovered that the raid had been made by the enemy's 22nd Pioneer Battalion. Sergeant Bull (who was badly wounded), Sergeant Brewer, Private Mould (afterwards killed), and Private Shaw all did specially good work in fighting this raid.

The relief was continued as soon as this trouble had been dealt with, and was completed before day-break. The Wiltshires withdrew to the reserve trenches, but though this was a change from sentry routine there was little rest. Carrying and digging work had to be done, and working parties were continually being ordered out.

A party of naval officers, who had come to Flanders to see the work of their sister service, visited the Battalion and were shown round the area. Everything was explained to them; they were highly interested and asked numerous questions. The officers of both services spent a profitable day together, "swopping lies" as to the advantages and disadvantages of their lot.

The Wiltshires took up the same positions as before, when, on September 6th, they returned to the line and took over from the Manchesters again. Although the relief was a fairly quiet one, the Battalion had the misfortune to lose 2/Lieutenant W. C. Shaw, who was killed whilst getting his platoon into position. 2/Lieutenant Shaw was a most popular subaltern, and his loss was keenly felt by all.

The tour was for five days, during which the chief occurrence was a rush, made on the 10th, by a small party from "A" Company, to seize a suspected enemy machine-gun position. Whether the Huns decamped at the sight of our men, or whether they had some time before abandoned the position, cannot be said. But the party found no one in occupation when they arrived, and returned without a casualty. But the exploit was very well led by 2/Lieutenant A. C. V. de Candole, and was daring for such a small party to undertake when they did not know what was before them.

For three months the 30th Division continued to hold their portion of the line in the Messines—Wytshaete sector. The Wiltshires took their turn for work or rest with the other battalions. The

duration of each turn grew shorter as winter approached. They were usually kept from three to four days at a time in the actual front line trenches. The position of the latter was that reached in the offensive which took place during the previous June. It crossed the Wambeke, a tributary of the Lys, about two miles east of Wyttschaete. That village stood on high ground (Wyttschaete Ridge) which dominated a large tract of the country the enemy held, and was the principal advantage gained in the attack. But, owing to its recent capture, the front line was in a rough condition, and a tremendous amount of work had to be done, and was done, by the Division while they were in occupation. In the right sub-sector, which the Wiltshires held whenever their turn for the line came round, the foremost troops were in a series of shell hole posts, which afforded no cover from the weather and very little from the enemy. The supports and reserves, in rear, were trenches, with slightly better cover, though rather disconnected and not in a very advanced stage. The outstanding feature of this part of the line was the number of "pill boxes" which the Germans had left dotted about the ground. These were constructed of extremely thick reinforced concrete, which was practically unaffected, even in the case of direct hits, by heavy shells. They were mostly square and sharp cornered, but of various sizes and shapes, some with only one and others with three or four or more rooms inside. Sometimes the walls and roofing of these strongholds were found to measure as much as six feet in thickness. These "pill boxes," by reason of their solidity and whiteness, stood out boldly from the wasted country and were fine landmarks. To make them more useful as such they were quickly named, such as "Moonraker Cabin" and "Derry House," each of which was used in turn by the Wiltshires for their Battalion Headquarters when in the line. One of the largest "pill boxes" in the area was that used as the left front Company Headquarters. This was "Wall Farm," and was large enough to hold one platoon, in addition to the usual Company Headquarters Staff. This enabled the Company Commander to take in batches of his men at a time for drying, etc., and especially for attention to the feet, which at this time were giving a lot of trouble. "Wall Farm" seemed to make the Germans very angry. It stood

high up out of the ground, close up to their line, without even a pretence at hiding itself as a front company headquarters should. It could be seen for miles. Moreover, having made it themselves, the Huns knew its value. So they shelled it regularly every day, and their gunners became so skilled on this favourite target that a fair average of direct hits resulted. But the occupants merely felt a slight rocking motion as the shells burst on the roof, leaving small dents in the concrete. The support battalion's position was also well equipped with these "pill boxes," the principal one being "Torreken Farm." This was well decorated inside, and furnished.

For rests between their tours in the line the Battalion went first to "Irish House," then to "Bury Camp" and "Parrain Camp." All three were in the Kemmel district, and the men were accommodated in bivouacs and tents. All moves to and from the front to these camps had to be done at night, as Wytschaete Ridge, which had to be crossed, was in full view of the enemy. Marching to and from the line was always hard going, as the road was a rough and muddy one and a lot of it wood corduroy. On fine moonlight nights German aeroplanes would fly over this road, and every now and then dive down and let off a volley of rounds into the moving traffic. The Wiltshires were moving back to camp along this road, after relief, on the night of October 29th, when a German aeroplane came over them and dropped a bomb, killing one and wounding five of the Headquarters party.

October 29th.
Aeroplane bomb
hits H.Q. party
on the march.

As to actual fighting and offensive action during this period, there was little. Both sides expended a fair amount of ammunition on each other daily, but a great deal of it was wasted. Winter was once more fast approaching, and, as usual, the principal thing to combat was the weather. But a few days before the Division was relieved from this sector the Wiltshires made a very fine raid. This was on the night November 9th/10th, when, just after midnight, 2/Lieutenants Edwards and Ivison led a party of 220 men across No Man's Land, and, with great boldness, crossed the German line and pushed on to some 300 yards in rear of it. They then turned northwards, and, encountering three enemy posts, threw their full weight at one of them. They punished the enemy garrison, chiefly with the bombs

November 9th.
Wiltshires make
a raid.

they threw, and the officers themselves killed three Huns before successfully withdrawing their party. Our casualties were 2 missing and 1 wounded.

During the rests at the camps great interest was taken in inter-battalion football, and divisional and league matches were played with great enthusiasm. It was at this time that the 2nd and 6th Battalions again found themselves together, the 6th being with a neighbouring division. On October 6th, "B" Company of the 2nd entertained "B" Company of the 6th to a little sports meeting of their own.

November 12th.
Messines Sector
handed over to
Australians.

The 30th Division handed over the sector to Australians on November 12th. The Wiltshires were then in support positions, and were relieved by the 53rd Australian Battalion. After a short rest in Parrain Camp, they embussed on the 15th at "Suicide Corner," Kemmel, and were taken to billets at Steenvoorde, in which area the Brigade was concentrating. Nothing of importance happened there while the Battalion was resting, and in ten days the Division was moving towards the line again. This time it was to take over the Gheluvelt sector of the Ypres Salient. After a day's halt near Dickebusch, whence they were moved by train, the Wiltshires went into a reserve position, relieving the 12th Royal Sussex Regiment. This position was rather unique, the whole Battalion being accommodated a considerable depth under ground. It was one of two series of tunnels, each holding a battalion of infantry. That into which the Wiltshires now moved was called "Hedge Street" and the other "Crab Crawl." They were the outcome of much work by tunnelling companies, and contained such a network of passages and blind alleys that it was quite possible to lose one's way. Even during the coldest part of winter they were always warm, and, more often than not, stuffy, owing to the number of men kept there. But there were many long stairways leading up to the ground level, each giving ventilation and providing alternative means of escape should the other exits be blown in by shells. All the occupants had bunks, and there were officers' quarters, offices and store-rooms. An engine-room supplied the whole system with electric light by day and night. At the top of each exit a sentry was always kept posted, and this constituted the garrison's watch on the outer world. To the passer-by, above ground, these sentries and the noise of the engine-room exhaust were the only

signs of life. Even these were difficult to detect. Certainly the uninitiated would not have guessed that two live battalions, ready for action, were under that ground.

From here on the 30th, the Wiltshires moved into the front line and relieved the 19th Manchesters. They found it similar to that in the Wytschaete sector. The trenches were certainly in no better condition, and the same sort of concrete "pill boxes" were dotted about the land. In addition to these were numerous derelict tanks, wrecked and abandoned during the recent fighting. These two items the winding duckboard tracks and a few bare stumps of dead trees were the only relieving features of the landscape. A more barren and sordid sight one cannot imagine. It gave the impression that all life on the world had ceased. Movement, to any extent, was only possible at night. This was one of the biggest difficulties. Battalions, going and coming on relief nights, had to keep in single file along those duckboard tracks. Woe betide any man stepping off the track on wet nights. Years of hard shelling, from first one side and then the other, had ploughed the surface of the ground so deeply that a man was up to his waist in mud in no time. Pack animals had also to use these tracks, and many ended their hard-worked days by getting stuck in this bog.

The Gheluvelt
Sector.

The Wiltshires took their turns alternately in the front line and at rest, as before, whilst the Division was holding the sector. Each front line tour lasted four days, and they had three of them during this period. The first one was the most eventful of these. On the night of December 1st the Germans were doing a lot of shelling on the duckboard tracks. They had these well "taped," and unfortunately caught the Battalion's ration party as it was on its way back, causing a number of casualties to men and horses. Two days after this the Battalion had rather a "thin" time when they came in for considerable retaliation from the Germans as a result of the 2nd New Zealand Brigade attacking Polderhoek Château, on the left.

It is interesting to note here that whenever it became the Wiltshires' turn to hold the front line they were on practically the same ground as that on which they made their great defensive fight when with the 7th Division in October, 1914. But so great was the change in the landscape that it was

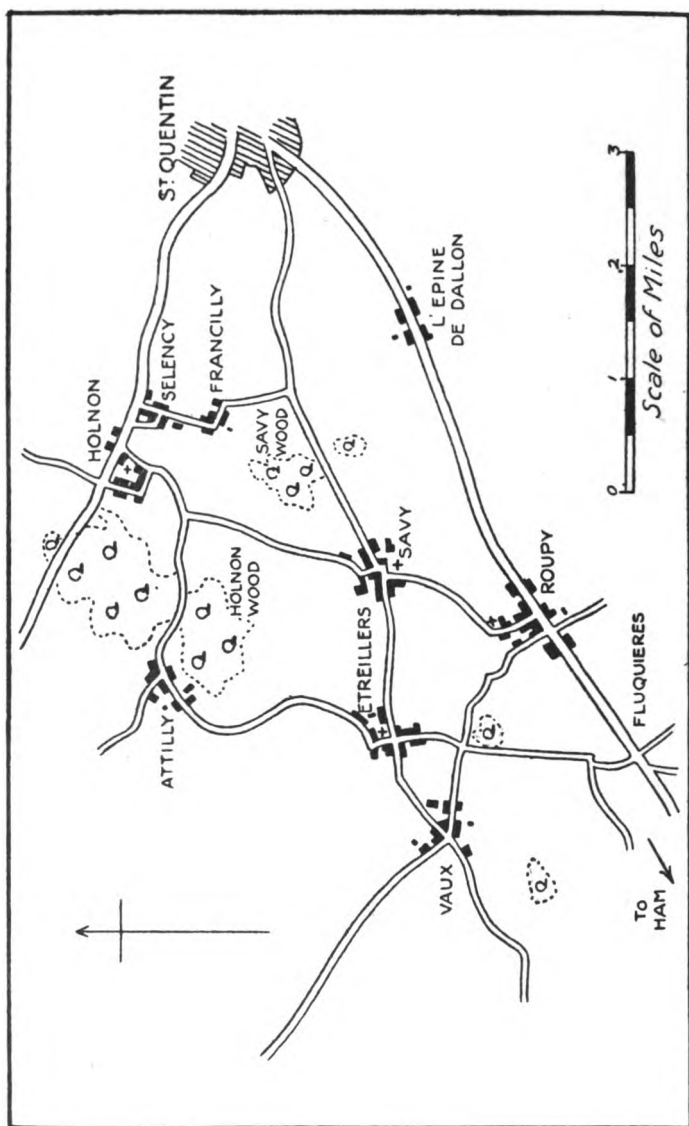
unrecognizable to any if any there were, who had seen it in that first great adventure.

The rest camps were situated near Reninghelst, a village west of Dickebusch and south of the Ypres—Poperinghe road. After each relief the battalions were conveyed there by a light railway, which ran from near Zillebeke Lake all the way to the village. "Chippawa" Camp was the one allotted to the Wiltshires, and consisted of wooden huts, under a cluster of tall trees, quite near the village. Reninghelst was swamped with such camps, and the few small original buildings were quite lost amongst the network of huts. The rests here were never very long, though while they lasted they were a pleasant change from the shell-swept desert in front. But most nights were disturbed by the enemy aeroplanes, which drifted about continuously as long as the weather kept fine, dropping their heavy bombs at random. Luckily the Wiltshires' camp was never actually hit.

Christmas, 1917.

The chief event at "Chippawa" Camp was the celebrating of Christmas and the New Year. On Christmas Day the Battalion was in the line, but they made up for lost time when they were out at rest on the last day of the year. Their Christmas feast was as good as any they had had in the previous years, and was followed in the evening by a concert given by the "Blue Birds" a really fine concert party which had been organized as a permanency in the Division. At midnight, when the New Year was born, various bands in the Division went round the camp playing "Auld Lang Syne" and other homely tunes. Everyone was up and about to "see 1918 come in," or, as many remarked, "another —! year of this —! war." They little knew!

On Boxing Day, Colonel Gillson handed over the command to Colonel A. V. P. Martin, and left the Battalion which he had commanded for the two most eventful years of its existence.



W.I.L.R.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT GERMAN OFFENSIVE.

1918.

THE first thing to affect the 30th Division in 1918 was the result of that famous discussion between France and England with regard to the amount of line on the Western Front each should defend. It was the wish of France that the British should be responsible for more front, and at a conference in France, at which the Premier of each country was present, it was decided that the British Army should take over from the French as far south as Barisis, a little village in the forest of Coucy, east of Noyons. The troops of the 30th Division were used to carry this out, and they were ordered to move south for this purpose.

The Wiltshires, having dispatched their transport on the previous day to go by road, entrained at Dickebusch on January 6th. They left the train the following day at Ebblinghem and marched to La Belle Hotesse, where they had three days' halt. Leaving there, they travelled by train again from Steenbecque to Longeau, whence they marched to Moreuil and had another halt. Continuing on the 13th by march route, and halting for a night at Caix, they reached billets at Carrepuits, where they remained for six days. Another six days were spent at Freniches, to which place they marched on the 20th.

January 6th.
Moving south to
extend British
line on the right

This slow process of reaching their destination was most useful in giving the Battalion ample opportunity for recreation and training, especially during the longer halts. The weather was good, and at this time of the year the fields could be exercised over. It was during these halts that, for the first time, an organized concert party was formed in the Battalion. It was called "The Nines," and gave the men no end of fun in the long winter evenings. Officers and non-commissioned officers worked hard in organizing both training and recreation, and thus the Wiltshires were in good trim when they neared the French lines.

They left Freniches on the 27th, and, in three stages, marched to relieve their allies. The first

January 30th.
Taking over the
Vendeuil Sector
from the French.

day they reached Crepigny and Cailloeul, the next Camp Rouez, and on the third the Vendeuil sector. They commenced at once to relieve the 279th French Infantry Regiment. The sector was a very quiet one, and the relief proceeded without a hitch. There were many interpreters, official and otherwise, in all ranks, and the two regiments got on exceedingly well together. Many were the compliments exchanged, and both English and French were in the best of spirits when the handing over took place. The Entente Cordiale was certainly well maintained in this particular spot on that day.

The actual front line for which the Wiltshires were responsible was taken over by two companies, "A" and "C." "B" Company occupied the support, a little in rear, and "D" went in behind that, in reserve. Headquarters went into Vendeuil Fort.

The French had put in a lot of work on the sector, both from the point of view of strong defence and comfort. The whole place was quite an example. This, with the beautiful scenery which surrounded it and the good weather which prevailed, made the Battalion look forward to an ideal trench tour. This was fully realized, and they were able to appreciate it, as there was little activity on the part of the Germans and our troops were ordered to cause none. But there was one misfortune. A chance German shell wounded Captain H. C. Clarke whilst moving on a road near the trenches on February 5th, and this officer, who had done splendid work for the Regiment, died in a casualty clearing station on the following day.

February 13th.
C.-in-C. inspects
the Division.

The Division left the sector on February 7th. The 2/10th London Regiment took over from the Wiltshires, who, after moving all that night in buses to Bethancourt, marched from there to Guiscard, where they spent the night 8th/9th. The day following this they moved on to billets at Le-Plessis-Patte-d'Oie, south of Ham. The chief occurrence during their stay there was a great parade of the Division for inspection by the Commander-in-Chief. This took place on February 13th on ground south-east of Erchou, and as at this time the troops were fit and had for some time been training and smartening up, the parade presented a particularly fine spectacle.

The next move was made on February 22nd by a march to Villers-St. Christophe, which brought them north of Ham.

All armies on the Western Front were now busy on schemes of defence to meet a great offensive which it was known the Germans were preparing with vigour. When, and in what part of the line, this would be launched was not generally known. But a shuffling of divisions took place, so as to get each formation into its most suitable battle position and be ready for any eventuality.

Strengthening
defences in rear
of St. Quentin
Sector.

This move of the 30th Division, of which the Wiltshires' march to Villers-St. Christophe was a part, was to do with this readjustment. In fact, even whilst the Battalion was at this village, a sudden order came in on the 28th to "stand to" and be ready to move, as an attack was expected. In this case, however, nothing developed.

They had ten clear days at Villers-St. Christophe, their whole time being taken up assisting in the work of defence preparations.

March 5th.
In Divisional
reserve.

A move in the direction of the line was made on March 5th, when they went into divisional reserve. This position was at Savy, west of St. Quentin, where the whole Battalion was accommodated in dug-outs, with the exception of "A" Company, which went to Etreillers, the next village in rear. They were there until March 16th. Nothing special happened, but the anticipation of the great enemy attack made the atmosphere rather "electric" the whole time. On the last day there, Captain H. B. Jones being called to Divisional Headquarters to be attached to the Staff, Captain A. O. Clayton assumed the duties of Adjutant to the Battalion.

The 30th Division was holding a front of about 3,000 yards, a little over a mile west of St. Quentin, stretching from the Canal de St. Quentin on the southern flank to a little south of the Vermand road on the northern flank. This was divided into two sub-sectors, each held by a brigade, the third brigade being held in reserve. (Brigades, by the way, had, previous to this, throughout the Army, been reduced from four battalions to three. Many Service battalions were either abandoned or amalgamated with another.) The two front brigades kept one battalion in front ("the forward zone"), one behind that in support ("the battle zone"), and the third still further behind in reserve.

On March 17th the 21st Brigade took over the right sub-sector, the 2nd Wiltshires being ordered to take over the front position and relieve the 19th King's Liverpool Regiment. The Wiltshires'

front extended from the Canal on the right to the St. Quentin—Savy road on the left, the companies being placed as follows: "C" Company on the right and "D" on the left held the outpost line, divided by the Roupy road. Each had a platoon out in front, the remaining three being entrenched in a line just in rear. A sunken road in rear of these held "B" Company, two platoons of which were behind each front company. The latter was known as the "counter-attack company," and was accommodated in dug-outs. "A" Company, in reserve, was with Battalion Headquarters at L'Épine de Dallon, which had once been a village on the Roupy road. This position formed a "keep," having all round defences and covering the crest of a small rise in the ground. It had a very commanding position. It corresponded to a similar "keep" about 2,500 yards to the north, Manchester Hill, which was occupied by the headquarters of the 16th Manchester Regiment, the battalion on the left flank. It was hoped that, should all defences in front break down, these two keeps, with our artillery putting down a barrage between them, would hold up the enemy in this gap, while the troops in the battle zone would break up any attack in rear and then counter-attack to regain the forward zone.

When the Wiltshires took over the line, our trench mortar people had 3,000 projectors of gas bombs of a large calibre in position, waiting for a favourable wind to fire them into St. Quentin. These were placed about ninety yards in front of the Battalion's line of observation. To protect them, they had two standing patrols, each of one platoon, out in front during hours of darkness. Either Colonel Martin or his Second-in-Command was on the spot to decide whether these things should be fired, and many precautions were taken to have the standing patrol warned to retire before the firing should commence. In spite of this, however, they were not warned, and on the night of the 19th/20th, when by pushing a button these projectors were let off, the patrol was still out in front. Luckily there were no shorts, and our men were not harmed. Lieutenant Moore, who was with this patrol, told Colonel Martin later that it was not so much the firing of the bomb projectors that worried them, but the row as they fell on the houses in St. Quentin, which was simply terrific.

On the morning of the 20th, Colonel Edwards,

Commanding Officer of the 2nd Yorkshires, but at that time temporary Commander of the Brigade, visited Colonel Martin. He said that the long expected great German offensive would begin on their front within the next twenty-four hours. His information was that there would be ten hours' bombardment, including mustard gas, before the attack was launched. He discussed the situation with Colonel Martin, and was not optimistic. A number of officers, non-commissioned officers and men were to be taken from each company and sent back, to be held in reserve under the Second-in-Command, Major Rapson. As soon as he had finished his interview with Colonel Edwards, Colonel Martin went round his lines to detail these and dispatch them. The following are the officers who remained in the line with the companies :—

" C " Company :

Lieutenant Glynn (commanding).
Lieutenant Miller.
Lieutenant Gosling.
Lieutenant Wiltshire.

" D " Company :

Captain Martin (commanding).
Lieutenant Hall.
Lieutenant Baker.
Lieutenant Hulbert.

" B " Company :

Lieutenant Capp (commanding).
Lieutenant Apps.
Lieutenant Moore.

" A " Company :

Captain Makham (commanding).
Lieutenant McQueen.
Lieutenant Edwards.

Headquarters :

Lieut.-Colonel Martin (Commanding Battalion).
Captain Clayton (Adjutant).
Lieutenant Ivison (Assistant Adjutant).
Lieutenant King-Smith (Signalling Officer).
Lieutenant Beaven (Officer i/c Battalion H.Q.).

After the news had spread round the ranks, officers and men alike, although they knew they were up against it, were very cheerful. Everyone was determined to make the Hun pay heavily for any of their trenches they attacked.

Although preparations had been in progress for a

long time, there was still a fair amount of "eleventh hour" work to be done, now that the time the attack was to be expected was known. The organizing and getting together of food, water and ammunition under gas-proof blankets was the most important. Especially so for "A" Company and Headquarters in the Keep, whose ability to hold out might depend on such things.

At ten o'clock that night Colonel Martin made a round of his defences, inspecting each company, giving final instructions, and doing all he could to put cheer into the men's hearts. He found them all busy, though more or less waiting and almost wishing that the thing would begin. They knew too well that the odds would be overwhelmingly against them, and that horrible suspense in the silence of the night was almost too much for them.

March 21st.
The great German offensive opens.

At 5 a.m. exactly on the morning of March 21st the German bombardment burst over the whole area with terrific suddenness. In a second everything was changed from quiet to a mad hurricane of explosions. For five hours it continued with the same intensity, and a lot of it was gas. Most of the shelling, however, went over the first few front lines of our trenches. The latter were more affected by trench mortars. Nor did they get the worst of it at L'Epine de Dallon. There it was mostly big stuff and gas. The gas was most trying, and made the whole garrison cough badly and run at the eyes. The chief drawback, in addition to the bombardment itself, was the smoke and fog which it caused, and which made it difficult to see very far. It was quite impossible for those at Headquarters to see what was happening to their companies in front.

A detailed description of what actually took place along the front line will, I fear, always be wanting. The dawn of that day was accompanied by a very heavy ground mist, which, with the smoke of the bombardment, formed a screen concealing the enemy's actions and making it impossible for our men to see what was happening to their comrades on the right and left. Briefly, what happened was this. Preceded by that colossal bombardment, the German infantry launched their attack at 10 a.m. They came over in hordes, and it was afterwards known that the actual force which attacked "C" and "D" Companies of the 2nd Wiltshires was two divisions. They did not make a frontal attack, but assaulted the Battalion's front on each flank, and were able

practically to surround the two front companies and "B" Company before they were seen. Actually, "C" and "D" Companies were attacked from the rear. They put up the strongest resistance possible, and undoubtedly did the Hun great harm. But, of course, before such masses the thing was impossible. They were quickly overwhelmed, and our men were either killed or captured. A runner from "C" Company succeeded in getting away and carrying this news to Colonel Martin at L'Epine. By this, only, did the Commanding Officer know definitely that the Germans were coming on. The German infantry must have advanced some distance west of L'Epine de Dallon before they tackled it. Probably, due to the fog, they overlooked it. For Colonel Martin says that the first signs of the enemy he saw was a party, coming like a mob, from the direction of Roupy. This was during a lift of the fog, and it was lucky it was so. For, having prepared two Lewis guns to deal with what they thought was a body of the enemy, they discovered, in the nick of time, that it was a party of their own cooks which they had left at the rear, "peace-time" Headquarters, being escorted back as prisoners. The garrison at L'Epine at once rescued their cooks, who were most useful as reinforcements, and settled the escorts for ever.

The next they saw of the Germans was a party laying telephone lines on a ridge between L'Epine and Roupy. Then streams of them passed along the valley between L'Epine and Manchester Hill, carrying boxes of bombs, ammunition, etc. Colonel Martin and his small garrison did all they could to delay this stream. They brought their light trench mortars into use with good effect. This action, however, discovered them, and they became the object of attack. The Germans came at the Redoubt in perfect order, as if on parade. The little garrison of officers and men kept their enemy at bay for a long time. They found their own defensive wire entanglement hindered their fire, and they had to stand up and shoot over the top of it. Full of determination, they held out against an enemy which vastly outnumbered them, and before the Germans could approach sufficiently near they punished them severely. It was on the east side, where the road cut into a redoubt, that the Germans first broke into the system. Our trenches at this point were not quite connected. The enemy bombed our men

back and succeeded in getting two of their machine guns inside the circle of our defences. The Wiltshires, using some ruined buildings as cover, tried to capture one of these guns, but the Germans cut through the brickwork with such rapidity that the scheme failed. All the time a hostile aeroplane kept flying round the Keep at a height of only about sixty feet, machine-gunning our men. Telephone connection broke down, and then the wireless was smashed; a second aerial was tried for this, but, although messages could be sent with it, none could be received.

When Colonel Martin had only fifty men left, all of them fighting hard though hopelessly cornered, shells from British guns started bursting in the Keep. This was, of course, a most natural error, for without communication it could not have been known, or thought possible, that the little band of Wiltshires were still holding out. All the same, it did not help Colonel Martin. Luckily he had some carrier pigeons, and of these he sent off two, bearing the message: "12.50 p.m., 2nd Wilts still holding out. Fifty men Redoubt. A. Martin, Lt.-Col."

Finally the Wiltshires were overwhelmed; it was inevitable. Here is Colonel Martin's own description of the finish: "The Huns were making a most determined bombing attack from both sides, and the Huns outside were shooting for all they were worth. A bomb landed and blew me into a hole, and I woke up to realize that a — Hun was laughing at me in an unpleasant manner, and had a more unpleasant bayonet. Everyone I saw near me had his hands up."

Before the Wiltshires were captured they had carefully burned any papers of importance, and destroyed the telephone and wireless instruments with bombs. One wireless operator was seen to be chewing the code whilst being marched with his comrades under German guards to St. Quentin.

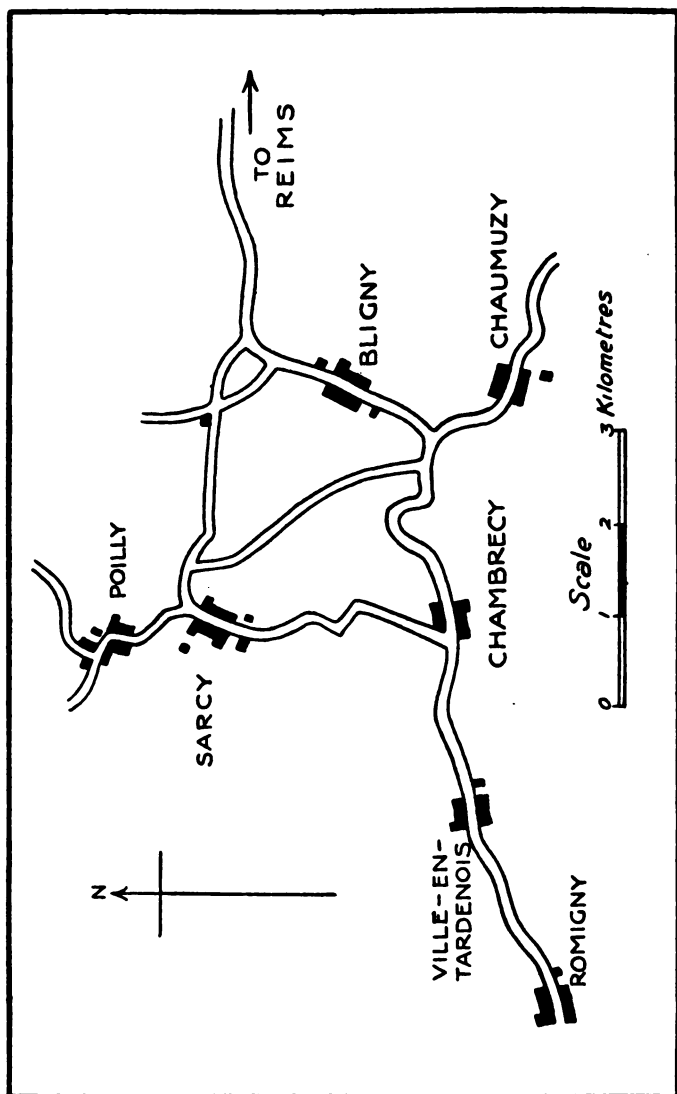
The Germans shot and killed Captain Clayton when they broke through, owing to the fact that, keen fighter as he was, he still held a bomb when, with the remainder, he put up his hands, and no doubt the Germans thought he was going to throw it.

Describing his progress after capture, Colonel Martin says:—

"Marching into St. Quentin, we picked up other parties of our men (prisoners). The road was

choked with transport and guns; their field guns were over our old front line trenches. The only 'plane of ours I saw that day came up the road and dropped bombs on the crowded transport we had just passed. We were only a few hundred yards from where the bombs fell; they were quite a pleasing sight. We saw some evidence of the effect of our 3,000 projectors; also more from the other divisional fronts. The German stretchers were the worst sights I have ever seen; just sacks between two poles, and in these the unfortunate devils were bumped along. Sergeant Johnston was one of the finest examples I saw that day. Wounded three times, he kept on fighting till the end. There were very many others, too many to remember them all. The German doctor in the dressing station was in no hurry to help the poor fellows who were in agony. One poor subaltern, with a bullet wound in his knee-joint, had to walk, or rather hop. I waited some time, and eventually got so sick with the sights, I joined the others outside. Our own doctor had tied me up well enough on the road in to St. Quentin. We were first marched round the town; some said to be shown off. I think our guns were blocking the exits, as we were herded back again. Some of us spent the night in the top room of a big building, with ceiling plaster to soften the boards; — cold it was, and we were hungry. A big gun fired all night just outside, so we did not sleep much. We (some thousands of prisoners by that time) were marched the next day to Aisonville. For food we had one slice of bread and jam, and a cup of substitute coffee. The next day we had only filthy cabbage, and marched to Landrecies. Arrived at 10 p.m., after a warm march. Thousands of other prisoners, all struggling for food. I gave it up and went to sleep; but was turned out again to be marched through the town to have a bath. This was at 3 a.m., all in the same water or whatever it was. Tried to object, but no good, had to go in. Managed to get clean by a refreshing shower afterwards. On the 24th, after one slice of bread and jam and coffee, we marched to Aulnoie. The prisoners were getting hungry and thirsty. The country people put out pails of water, and the men rushed at them like hungry wolves. But the guards kicked them over for fear their prisoners might get quite out of hand. There was a good deal of cursing. The French people seemed to fear the worst, and

were much upset at seeing such large numbers of British prisoners. They smuggled bread and butter to us under their aprons, though they must have been beastly short themselves. We were too hungry to refuse, however, and it was wonderful eating. The next day we entrained at Aulnoie, and on the 26th stopped at Liège for bread and coffee. Arrived at Karlsruhe on the 27th. Old prisoners were much interested in our news. They fed us with all they had. I went to bed almost full, and sent a wire to my wife by postcard to Switzerland."



Wilt.R.

CHAPTER X.

WITH THE 19TH DIVISION IN THE CHAMPAGNE DISTRICT.

ALL that now remained of the 2nd Wiltshires was their transport and Quartermaster's stores with the usual personnel, together with a few officers and men who had so far been kept out of the battle as surplus and held in reserve. These latter, together with every possible man that could be spared from the transport, were mustered and sent into the battle under Captain Gardner (who was killed on the 28th) to take what place in the line they could, and help to delay the steadily advancing German flood.

The little column of Transport, with many, many similar columns, moved each day along the road before the German advance. They passed through Moyencourt, Roye Eglise, Bernard, Rouvel, Guignemicourt, and Hangest-sur-Somme. Each day as many men as could be spared from tending the horses and looking after the stores were left behind to take part in the battle.

The great effort
to delay the
German advance

For the first two or three days none of this small portion of the Wiltshires knew what had happened to the main part of their Battalion.

The roads each day were thronged with every sort of traffic, including large numbers of refugees, who were struggling along with as many of their possessions as they had been able to salve and carry. Movement was intensely slow and most difficult, as so few men were left to attend to vehicles and horses. It was due to the good service of those few, however, that all the stores of the Battalion were saved. There were many Battalions who lost all they had.

In the meantime the little band that now formed the fighting portion of the Battalion, men scraped together from the transport, returned from leave, etc., were daily fighting a most heroic rearguard action. Many were the great and brave things done both collectively and individually, but which, in the chaos of this great struggle, were not reported. The two specially bold features of their fighting were the stand they made at Libermont (near the canal, west of Esmerly Hallon) on the

24th, led by Captain Gardner, and on the 28th, the day that gallant officer was killed, when they made a most determined counter-attack, led by 2/Lieutenants Payne and Jeans. On the same day they were relieved by French troops, and returned to the transport lines, which were then at Rouvrel, to form part of the Brigade Composite Battalion, which was organized by Major Rapson of all the remaining fighting men in the Brigade.

On the last day of this eventful month all that remained of the Wiltshires, both men and transport, had collected at the village of Pende, near St. Valery, where they remained for a few days. On April 5th the Division commenced to move north, and marching to Woimcourt on that day the Battalion entrained and spent the night on rail. They were dumped down at Proven at sunrise next morning, and marched to a camp at St. Sixte, three miles north of Poperinghe. There the Composite Battalion was broken up, and each of the three Battalions of the Brigade were on their own again. Two days later they marched on to Bridge Camp, near the much-battered village of Elverdinghe, north-west of Ypres. For five days they helped to move ammunition dumps to the rear in case of another enemy advance, and then moved up to the bank of the Yser Canal, north-east of Ypres, to be two days and a night in divisional reserve. During that night they were heavily shelled, but the canal bank afforded a strong protection, and there were few, if any, casualties. Relieved from this position by Belgian troops they marched via Brandhoek to a camp near Busseboom, and there awaited orders. The next day they were shifted to another camp, and there orders were received as follows:—What remained of the fighting personnel, excepting Headquarters, was to be formed into two companies. These were to join the 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment to form part of a fresh Composite Battalion, which was to be commanded by the Commanding Officer of the latter regiment. The Commanding Officer 2nd Wiltshires was to stand by with his Headquarters, transport and stores and await orders. The remainder of the day was taken up in carrying out these orders. The two companies were hurriedly organized and dispatched, and that same evening marched up to the Gheluvelt front line with the Bedfordshires.

April 5th.
Moving north
again.

April 19th.
and Bedfords
organize a com-
posite battalion.

The following night Major Rapson had orders to move his nucleus of a battalion to two hamlets close to St. Omer. The move was made at night, the transport and stores going by Buyssechre and Headquarters to Le Paradis. Here this little detachment of troops was kept for the remainder of April and the first twelve days of May. This skeleton of the 2nd Wiltshires was going through the most uneventful period in the Battalion's career in the war. With the exception of guard drill, by means of which the Regimental Sergeant-Major kept in fitness the few men he had with him, trimming up of the transport and sorting out of the stores, little or no work was done. Two things only reminded them of the war. One was the frequent bombing of St. Omer by German aeroplanes, and these attacks were near enough to be plainly seen and heard but never actually affected the Wiltshires' billets. The other was the flooding of the low lying country between them and St. Omer. This was done by opening the gates of the canal system, and was a precautionary defensive measure, as when the Germans were nearing Kemmel it was thought they would break through.

April 20th.
Headquarters
and stores move
to near St. Omer.

Very different, however, was the position of the two companies in the line. Hardly any news of their fate drifted through to Le Paradis, and even now records of their doings with the Bedfordshires are rather slight. They were engaged in heavy fighting all the time they were away from their Battalion, and they suffered severely. From the time they entered the front line at Gheluvelt on the night of April 19th they were subjected to the repeated attacks of the Germans, who were making terrific efforts to burst through the British line.

With the Bed-
fordshires.

The attacks were heavier on some days than others, but all through our men fought like tigers by the side of their comrades from Bedford. It was a repetition of the 1914 battle on much the same ground, and the Germans had the same objective in view—the Channel ports. But again did they find the British wall of determination impenetrable, and again did they fail to attain their object. Nevertheless, at times it was touch and go, and the British line was badly bent. Many times were the Wiltshires and the Bedfordshires compelled to withdraw to conform with the line. They suffered very heavy casualties, and some were cut off and taken prisoner. When they were withdrawn from the

battle and returned to their Battalion at Le Paradis on May 9th, only 2 officers and 71 other ranks reported.

As a result of the heavy fighting in which the whole of the British Army had been engaged, a great deal of reconstruction was being carried out about this time within the divisions. Some of the New Army battalions which had been much reduced in numbers were disbanded, and others were ordered to form a nucleus wherewith to assist in the training of the newly-arrived American troops at the base. Those men that were left from the latter nucleus battalions, after they had been formed, were used to strengthen other battalions.

May 13th.

Moving to join
the 19th Division

The 6th Wiltshire Regiment, which formed part of the 19th Division, was one of those ordered to form a training staff for the Americans. At the same time the 2nd Wiltshires were ordered to leave the 21st Brigade and the 30th Division, and to join the 58th Brigade of the 19th Division and there take over all officers and men of the 6th Wiltshires who were not required on the training staff. To carry this out, Major Rapson moved this small band of men by lorry on May 13th to Herzelee, where the 6th Battalion were. The 2nd Wiltshires had been a part of the 21st Brigade ever since they landed in France in 1914, and it was not a happy thing, after so long, to be ordered to join another. But the ranks of the Battalion were very depleted, and it was a pleasing fact that these were now to be filled with men of their own Regiment. On arrival at Herzelee, the Commanding Officer, 6th Wilts, handed over 20 officers and 509 other ranks before he left for the base with his training staff. The following day a draft of 81 other ranks joined, so that the 2nd Wiltshires, now with the 19th Division, once more became a battalion of reasonable strength.

Men of the 6th
join the 2nd.

Among those of the 6th Battalion taken over was a very smart, well-trained corps of drummers, equipped with French horns which had been presented by the French Mission attached to the British Army. They were unique and much admired, and were no doubt of considerable assistance to Major Rapson and his officers in strengthening the *esprit de corps* of the Battalion after so many changes had taken place.

The 19th Division, soon after they joined it, was ordered to move south to Champagne district, behind the French front. Here they came for the first time under the French Higher Command. At

sunrise on May 17th the Wiltshires started on the longest train journey they had done in the war. Being taken via Paris, they spent two days in the train, and arrived at Chalons-sur-Marne at six in the evening. On detraining they at once marched south, along the banks of the Marne, to Vesigneul-sur-Marne, where they were settled in billets late in the evening.

Vesigneul was a small old-fashioned village, but, being allotted solely to the Battalion, it was fairly easy to arrange comfortable accommodation. The country was new to them, and interesting. It was far away from the fighting, little affected by the war, and was looking its best in May. The change of scenery, after the struggles amongst the devastation in the north, cheered everyone up. The weather was excellent, and the opportunity was taken to rebuild the Battalion and initiate the newcomers with its traditions. The four companies were reformed, and each morning was devoted to their training, etc.

At Vesigneul-sur-Marne.

Reorganizing the Battalion.

The Marne Canal made a splendid swimming bath, which was specially pleasant owing to the hot weather. In short, life at Vesigneul was excellent. But it was too good to last. With a suddenness which characterized most events in the war, the Huns launched a tremendous offensive on the very front behind which the Wiltshires were resting.

The first news they got of this was through a brief order which came to their signals on the night of May 27th, which was to the effect that they must be ready to move to battle at one hour's notice. This was quickly followed by another, which ordered the transport to proceed to Luvigny the next morning.

May 27th.

Rest disturbed by news of fresh German attack.

The following evening, that is after the transport had left, a column of French buses arrived and carried the Wiltshires off to an unknown destination, leaving behind only a few officers and men as reserve surplus.

Travelling all night, the buses took the Battalion in a north-west direction, and in the early hours of the morning landed them at the cross-roads between Bligny and Chambrecy, north-west of Epernay. Major Rapson was at once ordered to take up a position on the heights north-west of Bligny, as an outpost to the Brigade. This position was easily reached and a defence organized. At 10.30 a.m. an order arrived for the Battalion to

Rushed to new battle front. rejoin the Brigade at once at Bligny. This, however, was countermanded before it could be carried out, and substituted with another to proceed to Sarcy and wait on the eastern outskirts of that village for further instructions. This was done, but the Wiltshires did not wait long at Sarcy, for at 2 p.m., the further instructions came, and they marched on via Polly to the high ground north of Bouleuse. Immediately on arrival there, they extended to cover a front of 1,500 yards. "A," "B" and "C" Companies occupied the front line, and "D" remained in reserve. All companies at once commenced to dig in and strengthen the position. During this they observed heavy fighting in progress to the north in the neighbourhood of Treslon and Germigny. This was a strong German attack on the 8th and 25th British Divisions, who had also come south, which, by sheer weight of numbers were compelled gradually to withdraw on to the Wiltshires' line. The latter gave covering fire as soon as it was possible, to assist these divisions in their retirement. By nightfall the Wiltshires hurriedly dug trenches and became the front line. There followed a considerable amount of confusion, as is usual with a movement of this kind, and trouble was experienced in getting the men of the various units sorted out. This might have been much worse had not the night been a comparatively quiet one.

May 29th.
Wiltshires become involved.

May 30th.
A strong frontal attack. The calm, however, was only one before a fresh storm, for at the first glimpse of dawn the Germans rushed madly at our lines, throwing all their weight into another attack. The Wiltshires were successful in preventing them from gaining any ground, but the troops on both flanks, after a determined resistance, were compelled to give way. This endangered the Battalion, especially their right, and at 10 a.m. "D" Company moved up to that flank. Thus the whole Battalion became one thin front line without reserve.

About midday both flanks of the Wiltshires began to yield ground, and at the same time German machine guns got into action at Germigny, enfilading our line and firing into the rear of our trenches. At 2 p.m. the Wiltshires were ordered to withdraw. The movement was carried out in good order, but with great difficulty. The companies had to run the gauntlet of heavy machine-gun fire, which was directed at them from all sorts of

unexpected points. They reached the ridge running east of Sarcy, and there took up a new position, but they had left many casualties behind them. A fresh line was quickly organized, with its left resting on a bridge-head. Shropshires and South Staffords were on the right, and a Cheshire Battalion on the left. With marvellous rapidity the Germans followed up the withdrawal, pushing their machine guns well forward and hiding their movements with smoke screens. Severe fighting was soon in progress again, most of the pressure being on the Shropshires and Staffordshires, who were forced to withdraw. This was immediately followed by a heavy assault on the Wiltshires' right flank, and the Battalion had to withdraw again to the south-west of Bligny, with their left resting on the River Ardre.

At dusk, the Germans having shown no signs of again following up, the Wiltshires began to retrace their steps, covered by a screen of scouts. Moving cautiously they reached their former position at the bridge head east of Sarcy, and got into touch with some French troops. After about three hours, during which they made a good reconnaissance, orders arrived for them to return to the position they had left. This was carried out, and the companies were finally again in the line south-west of Bligny by 5.30 on the morning of the 31st. Major Rapson was informed he had come under the orders of the 56th Brigade, that his Battalion was in reserve and must be available for counter-attack should this be needed.

Nothing happened during the first hours of the day, and the men were glad of a breather after the previous day's heavy fighting.

At five in the evening the Brigade Major came up with orders for a counter-attack to be made at once on some high ground north-west of Chambrecy. The companies were immediately marched to the spot, and within two and a half hours of receiving the order Major Rapson had organized and launched his attack.

May 31st.
Wiltshires
ordered to
counter-attack

He assembled his men in a small wood and deployed from there, with two companies in front, which he led personally, and two in the rear. The operation was difficult, as the attacking lines had first to cross a ridge, at the crest of which they were in full view of the enemy, and after that a stream on the low ground.

Opposition was met with at the start. Heavy

machine-gun fire from both flanks was combined with accurate shooting by the enemy's artillery. Our lines thinned visibly, but with wonderful determination they pushed on, and severely punishing any Huns who stood in their way, the Wiltshires succeeded in reaching their objective. Our casualties were heavy, but there was ample evidence on the ground that the Germans were heavier. No time was lost in digging a defensive line and reorganizing. Contact was made with French troops on the left flank. The position on the right was obscure, and the French sent supports there until the arrival of a party of Royal Welch Fusiliers secured that flank.

June 1st.
Wiltshires
narrowly escape
being sur-
rounded.

The Wiltshires spent a trying night, withstanding a heavy shelling and expecting the Huns to attack. But the next appearance the Germans made was on the following morning against the French. At 2 p.m. on that day (June 1st) the French Commander gave notice that he had been ordered to withdraw. This done, the Wiltshires' left was in the air, and created a dangerous situation. The Germans quickly took advantage of it and worked their machine guns so far round that flank as to be able to enfilade Headquarters and to fire at the backs of our men. In the absence of any other orders the Battalion hung on and prepared to make a stand against any odds, knowing that they were in immediate danger of being annihilated. In the nick of time, however, they got orders to withdraw to a position in front of Bois d'Eclise. The movement was commenced immediately, but could only be carried out with ingenuity and the utmost caution of each individual. All possible covering fire was required to keep off the enemy while small parties at a time were dribbled to the rear. They were lucky in getting clear of the fast encircling enemy without sustaining more than thirty casualties.

Another com-
posite battalion
formed.

Reassembling at Bois d'Eclise they took up a single thin line of shell holes at the edge of the wood on the Chambrecy—Bligny road, joining up with the Royal Welch Fusiliers on the right and the 8th Gloucesters on the left. They were tired of moving backwards and forwards, and were happy to be left in this position for the next five days, the first three of which were quiet except for continuous shelling. Most of this was directed on the back area, as the front line, consisting of posts dotted about at

random and well camouflaged, had evidently not been spotted. During this lull all the remnants of the Brigade, namely, those left of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, Welch and Wiltshire Regiments, were formed into one battalion and put under Lieut.-Colonel Rapson's command. This became the 58th Composite Battalion, and, together with the Composite Battalions of the other two Brigades in the Division, came under the orders of the General Officer Commanding 56th Brigade. The 58th Composite Battalion numbered 14 officers and 460 other ranks all told.

A warning was received on the night of June 4th that the enemy would probably make an attack the following morning. All precautions were taken, and reinforcements were sent up from the reserve surplus personnel which had been waiting at Sarry, near Chalons. The Battalion "stood to" at 2 a.m., and continued to do so until well after daybreak, but no attack developed, and with the exception of some fierce artillery duels the day was a quiet one. The next morning the Germans suddenly started a terrific bombardment some hours before daybreak, shelling the whole of the front area. Our guns at once replied with a counter-barrage on the enemy's front line. It was wonderful how few were our casualties considering the severity of the Huns' shooting, but it was evident that owing to our well-concealed positions they had not been able to range on our front posts. A large percentage of the enemy's shells were gas, the effect of which hung about the woods for the remainder of the day. Directly the hostile barrage lifted, a party of Germans, about two hundred strong, were seen to be advancing up the hill south of the Chambrecy road in artillery formation. The situation was quickly grasped by two Wiltshires' officers, Lieutenants S. Collier and H. W. Marsh, who were among the first to spot the advancing Germans. They got together thirty or forty of their own men, and, under cover of machine-gun and rifle fire, immediately led them out to meet the Huns in the open. The latter turned and ran as soon as they saw our men, and our Wiltshires' party, after having inflicted heavy losses on their retreating enemy, returned to their line. Soon after this it became lighter and more clear, and it was seen that the Royal Welch Fusiliers and Welch companies were more heavily engaged. Their

attackers outnumbered them, but they were making a determined resistance. Once the Germans got a footing in the small woods north of Chambrecy road, but the Welshmen immediately counter-attacked, punished them considerably, and drove them out. The enemy made attacks throughout the day, getting lodgments in our line occasionally, but each time being ejected. The Gloucestershires on the left reported that they had been attacked, but had withheld their positions. The Cheshires on the right were at one time forced to withdraw slightly, but on being reinforced regained their line and reported all in order again.

June 7th.
A short rest.

After dark things became quieter, and just after midnight, when they were quite calm, the 150th Brigade arrived on the scene and relieved the 58th Composite Battalion. Early on the morning of June 7th, these remnants of the 58th Brigade, fatigued almost to the utmost limit and with hours and hours of sleep overdue, literally crawled back to a resting place in the Bois de Courton. Except for one or two very short intervals, they had been fighting, and fighting hard, since May 29th. The Bois de Courton, though within reach of a few long range German guns, was some distance from the line. The men were overjoyed at reaching its cool shade and comparative quiet, and threw themselves down on the soft undergrowth for the sleep they so badly needed. They had lost many comrades and had been fighting against great odds day and night. But they had no doubt that they had, for the time being at any rate, broken the enemy's offensive spirit in this sector.

In the afternoon the commanders of the Division and Brigade visited the Battalion, and while the men lay beneath the trees, many still slumbering, praised officers and men on the fine work they had done. French commanders, too, were full of praise for the men of the "Papillon" Division (the sign of the 19th Division was a butterfly).

The following day the Composite Battalion formed up in the wood, and the Divisional Commander pinned the ribbon of the French *Croix-de-Guerre* on the officers and men who had received this honour from our ally, as an immediate reward for their valour in the fighting they had just done. Lieutenant F. V. Kellway, of the Wiltshires, was one of these.

Whilst resting in this wood, Lieut.-Colonel

Rapson was ordered to proceed to the base and take over command of the 6th Battalion of the Wiltshires, which was being re-formed there. To replace him, Major Shepherd, who had been back with the reserve surplus personnel, arrived.

On June 12th the Composite Battalion had once more to move towards the line, this time to be in brigade reserve. They marched to the north-east outskirts of Chamuzy, and there relieved the 151st Composite Battalion of the 5th Division. The position was organized in depth in groups of small trenches. It was situated on the slopes of a small hill, and was dug in the midst of a vineyard in full growth. A deep valley on the right, winding its way towards the north, exposed the ground to the Germans, and little movement was possible by daylight. The little village of Chamuzy was very broken, and heavily shelled, almost continuously, day and night. Casualties were few in the reserve trenches, in spite of the shelling, although the protection consisted merely of holes in the ground, but the positions were well camouflaged and hidden by vistas of vines. The men were prevented from putting their heads above ground during daylight, and rested almost on top of each other in the narrow slits that held them. But as soon as it was dark enough they were up and about, improving their accommodation and defences, fetching rations and stores, and, above all, stretching their legs.

Touch was made with the 3rd Division of Italians, who had just arrived in France to help against this German offensive, and who were on the right. A good liaison was established and a frequent interchange of patrols, assisted by an officer speaking both languages, kept each informed of the other's situation.

The Wiltshires' aid post, which was in Chamuzy and administered the whole Battalion, suffered a misfortune on the 15th. It was late in the evening, a time when the village was "strafed" extra heavily. The doctor was attending to a number of wounded and sick men in the cellar of a wrecked building, when a chance shell shot clean down the steps and burst in the room. It killed three and wounded eight of the helpless fellows awaiting attention. The shock was terrible, and those, including the doctor, who survived without being harmed had a miraculous escape.

June 12th.

Back to the line.

June 15th.

Disaster to the
Aid Post.

June 18th.
Relieved by
Italian Troops.

The Composite Battalion was relieved on the night of June 18th by Italy's 1/5th Regiment (Gari-baldians) belonging to their 8th Division, which was taking over the sector. Most of their officers could speak English, and the handing over went smoothly. The Composite Battalion got clear before it was light and marched back to Hautville.

On arrival there each Battalion went to its own regimental transport lines, which were in and around the village, and the Composite Battalion was broken up.

Captain A. J. Samut, M.C., took command of the Wiltshires, Major Shepherd having gone to hospital with trench fever.

When the Italians had completely taken over, the Division was moved away from the area. The Battalion marched via Epernay to Cramant, where they spent the night, and then embussed for Le Mesnil Broussy. The latter was a comfortable little village, and the men were glad to be out of the sound of guns once again.

June 25th.
Lieut.-Colonel
Lord Thynne
joins at Le
Mesnil and takes
command.

On June 25th, Lieut.-Colonel Lord A. G. Thynne, D.S.O., who had previously, until wounded, commanded the 6th Battalion, joined the 2nd and assumed command. A very little resting, cleaning up and training in the little old-fashioned village of Le Mesnil, soon brought the Wiltshires to fitness again, though, of course, they were much reduced in numbers.

June 30th.
Returning to the
north.

On the last day of June the Division commenced to move north again, and the Battalion, leaving Le Mesnil Broussy, marched about seventeen miles to Vassiment and halted for one day. Next they marched to Sommesous, and from there were taken by train, via Paris and the coast, to Anvin. The march continued, and there were two more halts, Vieille and Campagne le Boulonnais, at the latter of which places they stopped for a week. Finally they arrived at Auchy au Bois, which was to be their station for nearly a month.

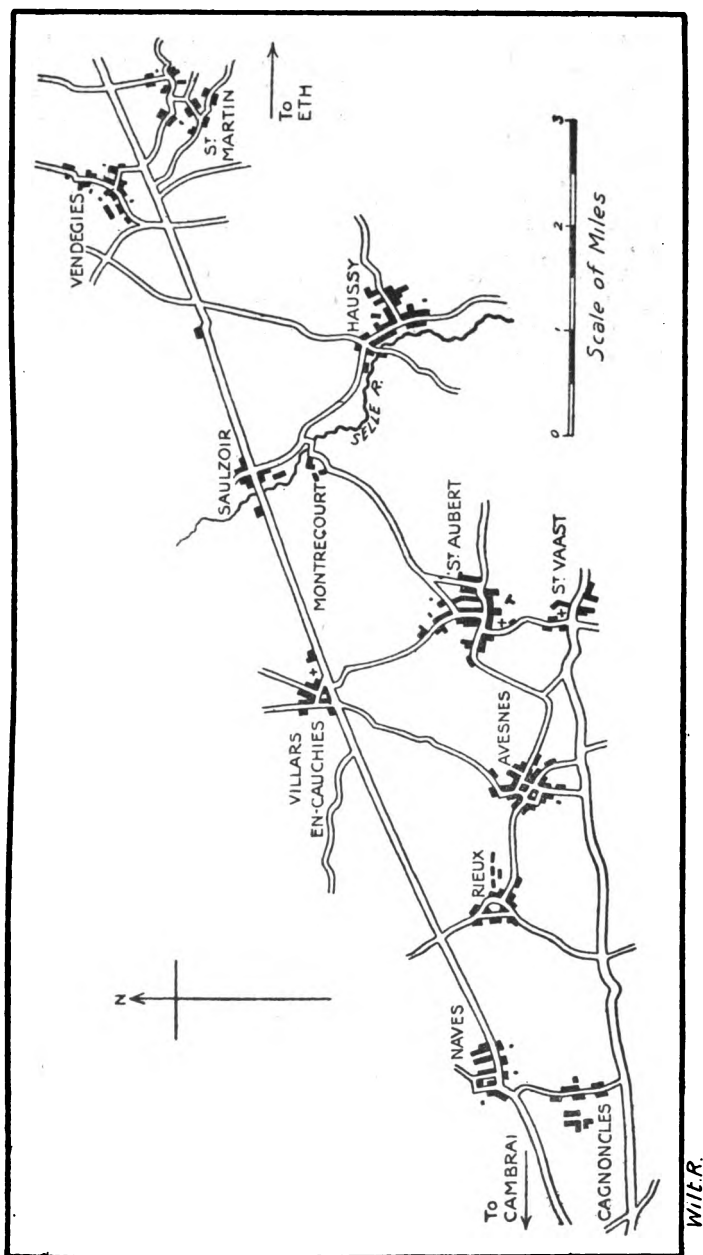
The Battalion was badly in need of a good hard training. It had not had a really good chance for this since the Germans first launched their offensive on March 21st. Many old retainers had been lost, and many of those who had joined to fill the gaps were fresh to the Regiment. The companies wanted to be left undisturbed long enough for them to reorganize thoroughly and improve their efficiency. The stay at Auchy gave them this opportunity, and

At Auchy au
Bois.

they were daily hard at it in the fields round the village, testing their musketry at the range and route marching. Frequently, too, the whole Battalion went in buses to an abandoned aerodrome at Lozingshem, where there was plenty of room for it to extend and practise open fighting.

Auchy was a fairly large village in a mining district, a complete change of scenery after Champagne. But the billets were good and comfortable, the villagers most amicable, and supplies plentiful.

When, on August 6th, the 2nd Wiltshires said good-bye to Auchy au Bois, though they were sorry to leave, they were in the highest spirits and ready for anything.



CHAPTER XI.

NORTH AGAIN TO FINISH THE WAR.

THE Division now moved to take over the Hinges Sector, and the Wiltshires left Auchy on August 6th. They were taken straight up to the line in buses, and their orders were to relieve the 1st Gordons in the outpost line north-east of Hinges. They arrived that evening, and the position was successfully taken over that night.

August 6th.
19th Division
moves to take
over the Hinges
Sector.

Like most other parts of the British line, the Hinges sector had considerably altered since the outbreak of the German offensive. Before March 21st the line ran almost due north through Neuve Chapelle. But the German attacks had made a big dent in our line, which now turned back from just east of Bethune, in a big curve which nearly touched the Canal east of Hinges.

The position which the Battalion took over from the Gordons consisted of a front line on the north side of the canal and two support lines, one the other side of the canal and the other on the slope leading up to the village. One company occupied each of the support lines, and the other two were in front. The line faced north, and was dominated by the high ground on which Hinges stood. Battalion Headquarters occupied a ruined house on the northern outskirts of the village, and had the advantage of being able to observe any of the companies' positions. Hardly a mile westward was Les Harisoirs, where so many happy days had been spent in 1915-1916. Those now with the Battalion, who were also with it in those days, could not help feeling rather depressed at the sight of the ruins of Hinges and Les Harisoirs, and the surrounding country covered in shell holes. They had bathed in the canal, which now ran in front of their support line, and had watched the peasants working peacefully in the fields, which now held their front line and its inevitable and desolate No Man's Land.

The front line was a series of shell-hole posts, dotted about at uneven intervals in the tall growth

of recently-cultivated ground. The Germans' position was some distance away, but the intervening ground was flat and exposed.

The support company on the canal bank were in trenches which had been constructed by French Territorials as far back as 1915. In those days they formed part of the rear defences to be used in case of emergency, and few had imagined they would ever be occupied. Having been exposed to three years' weather they were in a rotten condition.

The trenches which held the other support company had been recently dug and were better. But being on a slope, facing straight at the enemy, they were constantly subjected to most accurate shell fire, and were always needing repairs.

August 7th.

The beginning of
the end.

Only a few hours after the Wiltshires had settled in their positions the 4th Division, which was on the left, sent word that the enemy opposite them was withdrawing, and that they were pushing forward in pursuit. This was at 6 a.m., and the Wiltshires immediately sent out patrols to test their own front.

These, however, met with opposition as soon as they left the trenches, and after making certain that the enemy had not moved from his position they returned to the line. But it was necessary to keep in touch with the 4th Division, and to that end "B" Company, on the left, pressed forward about 200 yards.

One of the landmarks of the Germans' front opposite the Wiltshires was Vertbois Farm, a small cluster of trees with heavy undergrowth (the farm buildings themselves having been destroyed). From this point machine guns persistently worried "B" Company's new front, and the artillery was informed. Good shooting sent the offenders scattering in all directions.

The next day "A" Company sent out a patrol which succeeded in pushing 400 yards ahead. In doing this, however, 2/Lieutenant I. J. Davies was killed and 2/Lieutenant Mauran wounded. "B" Company also sent out a patrol, which reached Vertbois Farm, and found that the Germans had abandoned it. The patrol established a post there, but had to leave it before the end of the day owing to accurate hostile shelling.

After dark "C" Company took the place of "B" as left front company, and similarly "D" changed places with "A" on the right. Following this the Battalion found considerably more opposition to

their attempts to advance, and as the front companies had orders not to heavily engage the enemy they could not be too ambitious. Both, however, made attempts to gain ground, and suffered casualties, among which was the Commander of "A," Captain H. A. Gale, M.C., who sustained a wound in the head, as a result of which he died later in hospital. Machine guns were the chief obstacle, but the Germans caused our men much discomfort with a continuous rain of small gas shells, of which they seemed to have an unending supply.

On the morning of the 10th the principal obstruction to further advance was a machine gun firing from somewhere south of Vertbois Farm. It was cleverly concealed and so well handled as to make any attempt to advance over the open certain of failure. It was finally located in a field on the opposite side of a ditch eight feet wide. (The latter was part of the Tubeaut stream.) One of the Platoon Commanders, 2/Lieutenant M. Sillars, made a bold plan on the spur of the moment, and, accompanied by 2/Lieutenant Strothers, led forward one rifle and one Lewis gun section. These officers succeeded in getting their little party across the ditch, and there, as planned, the Lewis gun section and four rifle grenadiers engaged the enemy post. Under this cover and armed with bombs, the two officers and one soldier, Private W. T. Smith, attacked the German machine-gun team. A fierce struggle ensued, but the three Britishers went for their enemy with such lightning dash that the enemy machines-gunners were completely paralysed. The post was routed; twelve Huns were killed and two taken prisoner. Both our officers were wounded, but they brought their prisoners back to our lines, Sillars appearing with his clothes torn off his back. The exploit served the double purpose of getting rid of an obstacle and obtaining an identification, the prisoners being found to belong to the 2nd Guards Reserve Regiment. They were brought back to Battalion Headquarters in fine style just as the Divisional and Brigade Commanders were calling there. A report of this feat of arms was published throughout the Division as a fine example of the use of all arms in a local attack. 2/Lieutenant Sillars was awarded the M.C. and Private Smith the M.M.

August 10th.

A bold raid on a German post.

The Battalion suffered a number of casualties that

day, including 2/Lieutenants Bellot, Jenkins and Yells wounded, and also 2/Lieutenant Coryn, who was gassed.

The 9th Welch took over the line that night, and the Wiltshires, having advanced the line about 1,000 yards, had a few days' rest in Choques.

Moving up towards the line again on August 14th, the Wiltshires relieved the 9th Royal Welch Fusiliers in practically the same lot of trenches north-east of Hinges as those they had taken over from the Gordons a little over a week before. But whereas the position was then a part of the outpost line it now served as the Brigade support line. The Germans, however, although now some distance away, could still shell it, and did. The Huns still seemed to favour gas shells in this sector, and there were a number of casualties from this.

Four days later the Wiltshires moved up to the outpost line, now some hundreds of yards further forward than when they last occupied it. "A" and "B" Companies held the front line this time with the 8th Gloucesters on their right and the 1st Warwicks on their other flank. They sent out patrols immediately after relief to test the situation, but these were at once heavily fired on and, according to their orders, returned.

On the afternoon of the day following relief information was received that the Germans were retiring on the left, and "B" Company, on that flank, was ordered to send out a patrol. This was dispatched under 2/Lieutenant Chapman, but as much opposition was met with as before, and no progress could be made. Lieutenant Chapman was wounded. Later 2/Lieutenant Dann, of "A" Company, took out a patrol on the right, and succeeded in establishing a post about 100 yards ahead. The Gloucesters' patrols then came forward and got into line with Lieutenant Dann's post, but neither "B" Company nor the Warwicks could make any headway that day.

A quiet night was spent, but the Battalion was minus one more officer, Captain Marsh, Commander of "D" Company, who was taken to the ambulance badly affected by gas shells.

Before it was light on the following morning a man from "A" Company spotted a small German ration party which had evidently lost its way. With wonderful coolness he went straight up to these

men and so startled them in the dark that they at once surrendered to him, and he proudly marched them, thirteen in number, back to our line.

This incident shows the crumbling morale of the enemy and foreshadows the great events of the next two months.

At dawn, preceded by patrols, both front companies made such progress that Battalion Headquarters moved forward from Hinges to a series of trenches on the north side of the canal known as the Aberdeen line. More advance was made during the morning until a point was reached where the lines of direction for the flanks of the 58th Brigade converged. The troops on each flank joined up in front of the Wiltshires, who called a halt and waited for orders. In the afternoon, by moving small parties at a time, they withdrew to the Edinburgh and Aberdeen lines. Here they remained whilst the 57th Brigade's front was being "squeezed out" as theirs had been, and when this was done the 19th Division was ordered to relieve the 4th Division on the left. To carry this out the 58th and 56th Brigades were to take over the 4th Division's front and the 57th the Reserve. The Wiltshires' orders were to take over the support trenches of the 58th Brigade's area, occupied by the 2nd Duke of Wellingtons. Whilst there, Lieut.-Colonel Thynne went on short leave, and Major Shepherd was temporarily in command.

On the night of August 31st the Battalion moved up to the outpost line, which was now north-east of the Lawe River. They took over the right half of the Brigade front, relieving the 9th Royal Welch Fusiliers. The 9th Welch were on the left. "C" and "D" Companies were in front, and as soon as it began to get light both these companies set out to try to gain more ground. They made about 200 yards, but strong resistance prevented them from going further. Battalion Headquarters then moved across the Lawe River to some old German dug-out on the edge of a road.

September 2nd.
Some progress
made.

The Germans in their retirement left many "booby traps" in their wake, such as charges under roads with time fuses, bombs in dug-outs made to go off when doors were opened, and many other tricks. These were the chief things to look out for and avoid at this period. A special party of Royal Engineers was employed to discover them. Accidents were continually happening from this cause, but the

Wiltshires were lucky in escaping them. Two days after coming into the line, the front companies were able, by determined effort, to make more progress. A group of houses on the right in front of "C" Company harboured enemy machine guns, and hampered advance in the first part of the day. This was at first dealt with by trench mortars and rifle grenades, and after "C" Company went forward to clear it. Seven Germans, five of which fell to the company's Lewis guns, fled from one of the buildings. An advance of about 400 yards was made during the day. Resistance, however, was still very strong, and it was decided to make a properly organized and combined attack, with the aid of artillery, on the following day.

Some of the Divisional artillery field guns were moved forward at once for this purpose. Also in preparation a slight adjustment of the companies was made that night. "C" Company withdrew to a position in front of Battalion Headquarters and became Battalion reserve, handing over their half of the front to the 9th Welch. "A" and "B" Companies moved up to the front line, each taking a third of "D's" line, and on the right and left of that company respectively. Before it got light on September 3rd the companies were arranged in their jumping-off positions, and Major Shepherd, with the Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Fraser, had established an advanced Headquarters just in rear.

September 3rd.
A local attack.

At 5.30 the artillery and machine-gun barrage commenced, and three minutes later slowly lifted toward the enemy's line. The front companies followed, and, overcoming all difficulties, gained the first objective within a quarter of an hour. After a short pause the advance was continued, and the attack progressed precisely according to programme until the final objective was reached. The Germans, who expected us to wait until they continued their retirement in their own time, were taken completely by surprise. Considerable ground was gained, the Wiltshires consolidating on a line east of the cross roads "Rouge Croix," just north-west of Neuve Chapelle. The Battalion took fifty prisoners and five of the enemy's machine guns. Their own casualties were comparatively small, 6 men being killed and 2/Lieutenant Dann and 17 men wounded.

The Companies reorganized on their new line, and dug hard to make a strong defensive position. The Germans did not counter-attack. The night was

marked by shelling over the whole area, but otherwise nothing occurred, and the morning that followed was quiet. Battalion Headquarters moved forward to some fine concrete buildings, evidently recently constructed by the Germans, and it was here that Lieut.-Colonel Lord Thynne rejoined and resumed command. Later that day patrols were sent out which established themselves as far forward as the old German line of 1917. Thus in this sector the whole of the ground which had been lost to the enemy since the beginning of their offensive was regained.

The 8th Gloucesters arrived at midnight, and took over the line from the Wiltshires, the latter marching back to the banks of the canal north of Hinges. There they rested for four days, one of which was taken up with an excursion to Bomy, where the companies practised attacks under instructors from Corps Headquarters. There was also a pleasant change from the monotonous routine of training when, armed with sickles, a number of men were told off in reaping parties to cut the fully grown corn which had been so diligently sown by the peasants before the offensive.

The Wiltshires moved towards the line again on September 10th, being taken in buses that afternoon from Hinges to "Zelobes Post." From there they marched to relieve the 3rd Worcesters, who held the support position to the left Brigade sector near Richebourg St. Vaast. The Germans were indulging in a good deal of wild shelling, and the Battalion commenced to suffer casualties directly after taking over the position. A large percentage of the shells were gas, and among those affected was 2/Lieutenant Dakin.

The Battalion was ordered to move into the front line on the 14th, and at dusk on that day they commenced to relieve the 9th Welch. It was in so doing that the Regiment suffered a heavy blow. Lieut.-Colonel Lord Thynne, accompanied by Lieutenant Collier, Captain Campain (Medical Officer), and five men was proceeding along the road to his front line Headquarters when the party came under a sudden burst of shell fire. The shells fell directly among the party, and not one of them escaped. Lord Thynne, Lieutenant Collier and three men were killed instantly, and Captain Campain and the other two men were badly

September 14th.

wounded. The news was a terrific shock to the Battalion, and, indeed, to the whole Division.

Lieut.-Colonel Lord Alexander G. Thynne, D.S.O., M.P., who loved to be with a battalion in the line, had put in some of the finest work for the Regiment during the war. Commanding first the 6th Wiltshires till he was wounded with them at Messines, and later the 2nd Battalion his great personality inspired all who came into contact with him, and his untiring work for the good of the Regiment brought each battalion to the highest state of efficiency whilst under his command. Always very human in his dealings with men, those who served under him were full of admiration for him, and although he had only for a short time led the 2nd Battalion his loss could not have been more deeply felt. Besides the D.S.O. he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre for his liaison work between the 19th Division and the French, which he did so successfully in the Champagne district during the defence against the German attacks in June.

Lieutenant Simon Collier, M.C., who had served continuously with the 2nd Battalion since the day he joined them from the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry in January, 1917, was devoted to the Wiltshires. First as transport officer, next commanding a platoon in "B" Company, and finally as signals officer, he showed great keenness, with plenty of character and initiative. His feelings against the Huns were very strong, and as the war progressed he got more and more reckless in his fighting.

The Wiltshires remained in the front line for a week, during which they made progress by steadily pushing forward patrols each day and taking up advanced positions wherever they found it possible. Lieut.-Colonel C. F. King, D.S.O., M.C., of the Cheshire Regiment, was sent up to take command temporarily. The chief event of the tour was a small attack made by two platoons of "B" Company, under 2/Lieutenants Davie and Virgin. They went over the top on the night of the 19th, under cover of a light shrapnel barrage. The object was to bring up the right flank of the Battalion to suitable jumping-off positions in readiness for a proposed attack by the Brigade on a German position known as Maudlin Trench. The latter proposal was abandoned later. Virgin's platoon was on the right, and advanced successfully,

September 19th.
Two Wiltshire
platoons make a
small attack.

But Davie's men were badly held up by a thick belt of wire, and after determined efforts to push on were forced to withdraw. Virgin's platoon being thus left out in front unprotected was ordered to return to its original line. During this fighting 2/Lieutenant A. C. Davie was killed instantly by a bullet wound in the neck. Both officers showed splendid dash in the leadership of their platoons.

On the night of the 22nd the 1/4th King's Shropshire Light Infantry relieved the Wiltshires, who were moved by light railway to Hinges. After a few days quiet resting at Hinges, news came through that the Division was about to be relieved. But before leaving the area the Wiltshires moved into the line of "Retention" near Le Touret and relieved the 3rd Worcesters in work that had to be done in conjunction with the Royal Engineers.

The 74th Division arrived to relieve the 19th, and on October 1st the Battalion was relieved by the 16th Suffolks and moved that day to Sains les Pernes. Whilst there Major P. S. L. Beaver, M.C., who was with the Battalion in the earlier days of the war, arrived to assume command, Lieut.-Colonel King returning to his regiment.

The 19th Division was bound for the Cambrai front, and a move was made on the 4th to Saulty le Bret by train, and on foot from there to Gouy en Artois. After two days buses took them on to Graincourt, and from there via the Corps support trenches near Cantaing (where they rested on the 9th) the Wiltshires marched into billets in Cambrai on October 10th.

October 1st.
19th Division
goes to the
Cambrai front.

But the stay at Cambrai was brief. The Germans were almost in full retreat before the pressure being made on them by the British, and on this front reserves had to be on the move nearly every day to follow up.

Thus on the 13th the Battalion marched to Cagnoncles, and again on the 16th to Rieux.

Following up the
German retreat.

With so short a time spent in each place it was necessary to carry out training *en route*, and this was done successfully, in the way of brigade tactical schemes, whilst actually on the march from one lot of billets to another. There was, however, a great deal of rain, and as the billets the men had to occupy were very shattered they were anything but comfortable when they arrived wet through for their evening's rest. But nothing could damp their spirits

now that the Germans were at last, so it seemed, really on the run.

An attack was planned to be made on the 20th in the region of Haussey, which was in the hands of the enemy. In preparation for this "B" and "D" Companies were moved to the relief of the two right companies of the 10th Warwicks in the front line. The position was just west of the railway which skirts Haussey. On the same day Headquarters and the remainder of the Battalion moved to St. Aubert. The preparations were pushed on the following day, including the digging of some slit trenches to form a battle headquarters. A patrol went out from "D" Company in the afternoon to see if the Germans were still holding to the railway embankment. They managed to cross the River Selle, but were fired on after that, and the non-commissioned officer of the patrol was the only one who got back to our lines unharmed. 2/Lieutenant Walsford at once took out another patrol to try to bring in the wounded. He gained the railway embankment, and found it had been vacated by the enemy. The wounded were brought in, and as a result of the information gained the companies moved to the embankment and made new assembly positions for the attack in place of those previously planned. The barrage table was altered accordingly. In the evening Headquarters moved to their battle position, and "A" and "C" Companies took up their assembly positions alongside the other companies.

October 20th.

An attack to
harass the Ger-
man retirement

While it was still dark, in the small hours of the morning of the 20th, our barrage opened and continued for three-quarters of an hour before our men went forward. A number of casualties were suffered during this period from our own "shorts," and at times so many of our own shells fell among our men as to threaten disaster. In the war of movement, which had now taken the place of trench warfare, it was not so easy to arrange effective barrage as formerly. But at the appointed time the companies went forward in perfect order. "A" and "C" Companies were in front, "D" in support, and "B" in reserve. The attack progressed with fine precision, and the final objective was reached by 7.30 a.m. The new position was held until the evening, when the Battalion was ordered to advance another thousand yards. The fact that this last move was carried out without opposition showed the extent to which the enemy had retreated.

The whole operation had cost the Wiltshires 3 officers and 119 other ranks killed and wounded. At dawn the next morning a small German patrol attacked the left platoon of "C" Company, but was soon driven off. The attackers fled, leaving two of their dead and one wounded behind them, and also a new kind of automatic rifle, which fell into our hands.

The 9th Welch arrived that evening to take over the position, and after relief the Wiltshires withdrew to just in rear of the supports. They disposed themselves along the sunken roads and dug in along the railway embankment, and when settled were able to snatch a few hours' sleep. "A" Company went forward again during the night, covering the ground over which they had fought in order to search for and bury their dead comrades.

On October 23rd the 61st Division, which had been waiting close at hand, now came up and took over the whole of the 19th Divisional front. The Wiltshires were ordered to withdraw without being relieved, and they marched back during the day to billets they had occupied before at Rieux.

October 23rd.
Wiltshires leave
the line for a
short rest.

The remainder of the month was spent at Rieux cleaning up and reorganizing.

Moving in parallel columns across the open country the whole Brigade, on the morning of November 2nd, marched to Haussy. A halt was made, and the troops rested in the various barns of the village. At four o'clock the march was continued until Vendegies was reached, where the Brigade billeted for the night.

November 2nd.
58th Brigade
moves forward.

The next morning Company Commanders went to Mareched to reconnoitre the forward ground with a view to attack which had been planned for the 4th. The scheme was a little complicated as the Germans had made a voluntary retirement during the night, and the plans had to be altered at the last moment.

The Battalion left Vendegies in the evening, and just after midnight assembled along a road north of Jenlain. Battalion Headquarters was fixed up at La Patt Oie.

The attack was launched successfully at 6.0 a.m. under the cover of a good barrage. There was but little opposition until the River Petit Aunelle was reached. This obstacle, however, was soon overcome, and the attacking companies secured their objective by 10.15, with only small losses. As soon as the companies had reorganized they pushed out

November 4th.
Another attack
keeps the Ger-
mans on the
move.

strong patrols to try to clear the village of Eth. But there was too much opposition, and these patrols had to return. 2/Lieutenant French, however, with the patrol he was leading, managed to capture nine prisoners.

It was decided to make a determined advance on Eth with the assistance of a barrage. "A" and "C" Companies were detailed for this assault, which they commenced at 4.30 p.m. They were entirely successful. Eth soon fell into their hands, and they took up a position on the high ground to the east of the village. But they had passed over the ground quickly, and "B" Company, under 2/Lieutenant Auton, was detailed to "mop up." The Battalion had taken many prisoners during the day, and this last effort produced fifty more, which were found hiding in the château. It was a strenuous day, but the men were spurred on by continuous successes. The losses were small, but among them was 2/Lieutenant W. F. Virgin, of "B" Company, who was killed during the advance to the first objective.

The Germans were now obviously on the run, and early the next morning the advance was continued and the line extended to Roisin. From here patrols pushed out in broad daylight to a road 1,000 yards east of Maison Blanche.

At this stage the Royal Welch Fusiliers, who hitherto had been in support, passed through the Wiltshires, who were ordered to "stand fast" and become left support to the Brigade.

Before dawn the following morning the Battalion was ordered to move forward and occupy the high ground west of Bettrechies to support the Royal Welch Fusiliers, who were about to attack. The move was carried out, but they were not required in the battle, and the remainder of the day passed without event.

November 7th.
Wiltshires re-
lieved from the
battle.

At Eth.

During the morning of the 7th the 9th Welch relieved the Wiltshires, who, after stopping for the night at Meaurain, moved on to Breaugies.

On the 10th the Battalion moved back to Eth to take up billets there. It was now a quiet village, containing just a few inhabitants, including their Mayor, who were rejoicing at being rescued from the tyranny of the Huns under which they had been forced to exist for so long. A special order was received from the Divisional Commander commending all ranks for the work done in the recent

operations, and congratulating them on their successes.

The next day opened in an atmosphere which was tense. The bits of news and rumours which had drifted about for the past twenty-four hours about delegates from the enemy crossing the French lines raised suspicious hopes which, after such years, one dared not think would be realized. But at 9.30 a.m. a verbal message came from the Brigade that hostilities would cease at 11.0 a.m.; this was confirmed through signals at 10 a.m., and there was tremendous rejoicing. The Battalion Drums paraded and marched round the small village playing their hardest, much to the joy of the few inhabitants. The Mayor spoke about the village church bell, which had been buried for four years to prevent the Germans taking it and using the metal. This was immediately unearthed, hung in a temporary position and rung violently. The rest of the day, however, was spent remarkably quietly. A great feeling of weariness overcame most of the men, which perhaps was only natural after so many days, or even years, of strenuous fighting. There is no doubt also that they were somewhat stunned with this more or less abrupt ending to such a long and tedious campaign, to which at times an end seemed almost impossible.

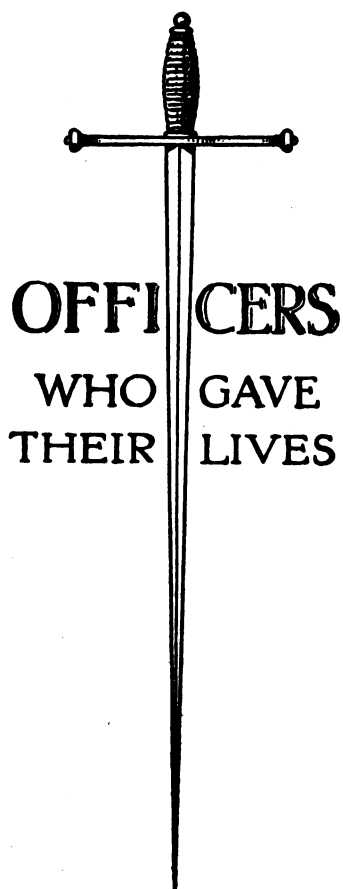
It is needless to linger over details of the period during which the Battalion was waiting to be sent home. The Wiltshires were moved back in stages with the rest of the 19th Division until, on December 12th, they reached St. Leger-les-Domart, where they remained in moderately comfortable billets until the beginning of February. A fair amount of training and smartening up constituted the day's routine, together with educational classes, which had been organized throughout the Army in France. The latter was a most excellent attempt to refresh each man's knowledge of the occupation he intended to take up on leaving the Army and returning to his peace-time life. The men were given a tremendous feed on Christmas Day, under conditions which made it possible to organize a really good battalion Christmas dinner. The same evening they were entertained by the "Nines," the Battalion concert party, which had been revived once more.

The sergeants' dinner took place on the 28th, and the officers' on New Year's Eve. All these celebrations were highly successful, and did a great deal towards making the Battalion one big happy family.

Now slow but steady demobilization began, and most of the work done in the Battalion was concentrated on the clerical staff, which had a colossal task with the men's demobilization papers.

On February 24th the Wiltshires moved in lorries to Villers l'Hopital, where the remains of the 19th Division concentrated. A few days after arrival there, those men who had volunteered for the Army of Occupation on the Rhine were taken from the Battalion and attached to the 2/5th Gloucesters. This left the Wiltshires at a strength of 19 officers and 111 other ranks. From this a cadre was formed, consisting of Lieut.-Colonel Beaver, Major Shepherd, Captain Samut, a few non-commissioned officers and men of Headquarters, and two or three non-commissioned officers and men from each company.

After handing over transport and stores at Candas, the cadre entrained to Havre on March 30th, and on the evening of April 2nd embarked on the American U.S.S. *Yale*, and sailed for England, where they arrived just over four years since they left to play their part in The Great Adventure.



<i>Rank and Name.</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Cause.</i>
2/Lieut. E. L. A. Burges ...	21/10/14	—
Capt. C. G. Bond ...	15/11/15	Killed in action.
Capt. R. W. Brown...	—	—
2/Lieut. W. H. Balkwill ...	—	—
Capt. C. G. M. Carter ...	23/10/14	—
2/Lieut. R. H. Carden ...	14/3/15	—
2/Lieut. J. H. Cortis ...	16/6/15	—
2/Lieut. J. H. Clarke ...	—	—
Capt. V. H. Clay ...	18/10/16	—
2/Lieut. A. C. Clarke ...	27/9/15	—
2/Lieut. E. W. Cain ...	31/7/17	—
Capt. H. C. Clarke ...	6/2/18	Died of wounds.
Lieut. S. Collier ...	14/9/18	—
2/Lieut. W. S. Campbell ...	24/10/14	Killed in action.
2/Lieut. E. A. Carrington ...	18/10/16	Missing.
Capt. R. G. H. Chaloner ...	3/4/17	Brought in dead.
2/Lieut. A. V. de Candole ...	1918	Killed.
2/Lieut. A. O. Clayton ...	21/3/18	Killed in action.
2/Lieut. W. H. G. Durrant	25/9/15	—
2/Lieut. I. G. Davies ...	8/8/18	—
2/Lieut. A. C. Davie ...	19/9/18	—
2/Lieut. A. E. Dakin ...	16/9/18	Died of wounds.
2/Lieut. F. H. Elwin ...	—	—
2/Lieut. P. G. Ferguson ...	10/3/15	—
2/Lieut. F. H. Friend ...	19/9/15	Died of wounds.
Lieut. M. R. Fowle ...	24/10/14	Died on or since.
Lieut. H. S. Grimston ...	22/10/14	—
Capt. W. M. Geddes ...	27/9/15	—
Capt. W. B. Gardner ...	28/3/18	Killed in action.
Lieut. W. Grindley ...	30/5/18	—
Capt. R. S. Galliers ...	31/5/18	—
Lieut. H. A. Gale ...	12/8/18	—
2/Lieut. E. R. Garnett ...	18/10/16	Missing.
2/Lieut. H. Gosling ...	21/3/18	—
2/Lieut. C. S. Gray ...	21/4/17	Died of wounds.
Capt. W. G. Hoare ...	10/3/15	—
2/Lieut. H. M. Hunter ...	6/4/15	Killed in action.
2/Lieut. G. H. B. Hodgins	25/9/15	—
2/Lieut. A. J. Hill ...	8/7/16	—
2/Lieut. S. T. Horton ...	—	—
2/Lieut. E. L. Hall ...	8/5/18	Missing.

<i>Rank and Name.</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Cause.</i>
2/Lieut. K. D. O. Husband	28/3/18	Wounded and missing.
Capt. M. C. Heenan ...	12/1/16	Killed in action. 1st Bn. Leinster Regt., attd.
Lieut. L. F. Hicks ...	10/11/18	Missing.
2/Lieut. V. R. W. Johnson	28/3/15	Died of wounds.
2/Lieut. J. G. G. Janasz ...	16/6/15	—
2/Lieut. S. C. Jenkins ...	21/8/18	Died of wounds.
Lieut.-Col. B. H. Leatham	26/9/15	2nd Bn. Yorks. Regt., attd.
2/Lieut. L. G. Lewis ...	31/7/17	Wounded and missing.
2/Lieut. D. L. Lyall ...	18/10/16	Missing.
Capt. A. C. Magor ...	17/10/14	Killed in action.
2/Lieut. D. R. Morrison ...	12/3/15	—
2/Lieut. C. A. Monson ...	18/5/15	—
Capt. E. C. Mudge ...	26/9/15	—
2/Lieut. E. J. Mack ...	27/9/15	—
2/Lieut. J. McWhannell ...	3/7/16	Died of wounds.
Capt. F. R. Mumford ...	8/7/16	Killed in action.
2/Lieut. C. N. Merriman ...	—	—
Capt. H. H. Martyn ...	21/3/18	Missing.
2/Lieut. P. J. Posener ...	—	—
Lieut. S. R. Parsons ...	9/4/17	—
Capt. W. B. Richardson ...	15/6/15	—
Capt. W. M. Rooke ...	—	Died (officially reported) while on leave to U.K.
Lieut. E. Spencer ...	24/10/14	—
2/Lieut. W. P. B. Spencer	—	—
2/Lieut. G. M. Stamford ...	—	—
2/Lieut. E. Schultz ...	27/9/15	—
Capt. G. P. Steer ...	26/12/15	Died of wounds.
2/Lieut. W. C. Shaw ...	6/9/17	—
2/Lieut. P. M. Simmons ...	20/10/18	—
2/Lieut. J. A. Thompson ...	—	—
2/Lieut. A. Thomas...	—	—
Lt.-Col. Lord A. G. Thynne, D.S.O. ...	14/9/18	—
Lieut. C. L. Usher ...	23/4/18	Died of wounds.
2/Lieut. G. H. E. Vidler ...	—	—
2/Lieut. W. F. Virgin ...	4/11/18	Killed in action.
2/Lieut. V. W. Venables ...	19/10/18	Missing.
Lieut. F. A. Verran...	18/10/16	Missing.
Capt. W. B. Wood ...	25/8/17	—
2/Lieut. G. E. Wiltshire ...	21/3/18	Missing.



HONOURS WON

OFFICERS

(Dates given are those of the "London Gazette.")

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER.

Lieut.-Colonel R. M. T. Gillson. 26/9/16. To be a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order. For conspicuous gallantry in action. Under very heavy fire he attacked and captured a wood. Though wounded himself, he resumed command when he heard that the next senior officer had been killed, and remained at duty till loss of blood compelled him to hand over to his Adjutant.

Capt. E. L. Makin. 23/6/15.

Major A. V. P. Martin. (About March, 1918).

2/Lieut. C. W. Ward. (About August, 1916). For conspicuous gallantry in action. After a successful advance he secured his flank with great ability and owing to the good information which he sent back, it was possible to organize further attacks. He showed a quick grasp of the situation at a time when reinforcements were badly needed elsewhere.

MILITARY CROSS.

Capt. P. S. L. Beaver. 23/6/15.

2/Lieut. G. Bennett. 10/1/19. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He held an isolated post with ten men for two days, being continually in danger of being cut off. He also maintained continuous communication with his Company Headquarters through heavy shell fire. Throughout he showed great ability and performed most valuable work.

2/Lieut. H. C. Clark. 17/9/17.

2/Lieut. R. R. Clay. 1/1/17.

Lieut. S. Collier. 20/9/18. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty as Signalling Officer. Throughout a week's fighting he maintained signal communication under great difficulties. Later, with this Battalion, he showed conspicuous gallantry in a counter-attack which completely repulsed the enemy. He set a fine example of energy and initiative.

2/Lieut. S. Edmonds. 18/7/17. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He led his platoon right up to the enemy wire and when that was found to be uncut he placed his men in shell holes just in front. He was badly wounded. He had previously done fine work on patrol.

Lieut. (A./Capt.) W. B. Gardner. 9/1/18. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He led his wave of infantry to the attack with great skill and coolness in spite of machine-gun fire at close range, maintaining the correct direction in spite of the fact that the troops on the right and left were swinging away from them. It was due to his excellent leadership that his battalion reached their final objective.

Lieut. H. B. Jones. 1/1/18. Bar to M.C., 10/9/18.

2/Lieut. P. P. Legg. 14/1/16.

2/Lieut. J. McWhannell. 27/7/16. For conspicuous gallantry. He led a party of eight N.C.Os. and men into the enemy's trenches to reconnoitre and inflicted loss on the enemy. Next night when another reconnoitring patrol had failed owing to hostile fire, he went out alone to the enemy front line and brought back the information required. He has set a fine example.

Lieut. F. R. Mumford. 3/6/16.

Lieut. & Qr.Mr. E. O'Hanlon.

2/Lieut. W. Rudman. 9/1/18. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. It was due to his ability and courage prior to an attack that all platoons reached their assembly positions. During the action itself, his fearlessness, energy, and skilful leading greatly inspired the men.

Lieut. A. J. Samut. 1/1/17.

Lieut. W. S. Shepherd. 1/1/17.

2/Lieut. M. Sillars. 5/11/18. For conspicuous gallantry and good leadership while in charge of a fighting patrol. He located an enemy machine gun and with half a platoon, under cover of Lewis-gun fire, succeeded in rushing the post, personally leading the charge. The machine gun was destroyed, two prisoners captured, and about fifteen of the enemy killed. He showed great pluck and dash as he was wounded early in the proceedings.

Capt. A. W. Timmis. 30/1/20. He commanded his company with great pluck and success during the three and a half days when the Battalion fought against heavy odds in trenches at Reutel, ending October 24th, 1914. He commanded flank company at the village, and by his coolness and excellent example repulsed many heavy assaults made on the flanks, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. Throughout he showed great pluck and resource.

Capt. W. A. Troup, M.B., R.A.M.C. (attd.). 17/7/17. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He displayed the utmost skill and endurance in clearing the wounded between the lines after the attack. Through the day he carried out his task under continuous shell fire, and was thus instrumental in saving many lives.

Capt. W. B. Wood. 9/1/18. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty when commanding the third wave of an attack. It was largely due to his ability and determination that the objective was reached and consolidated in spite of obstacles and strong opposition from enemy machine guns. The success of the operation was brought about by his skilful leading and fine personal example.

BAR TO MILITARY CROSS.

Lieut. H. A. Gale. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty when commanding a company in the front line during an enemy attack. Under heavy fire through the greater part of the day, he beat off the enemy with rifle and Lewis-gun fire, kept the front line intact and retained touch with both flanks. By his cheerfulness and personal gallantry he was largely responsible for the maintenance of the front line. (About August, 1918.)

DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL.

2/Lieut. A. J. Hill. 3/6/16. For consistent good work and devotion to duty throughout.

RUSSIAN ORDER OF ST. ANNE (3RD CLASS WITH SWORDS).

Lieut.-Colonel R. M. T. Gillson, D.S.O. 15/2/17.

FRENCH CROIX DE GUERRE.

Lieut.-Colonel Lord A. G. Thynne, D.S.O. 28/1/19.

ITALIAN SILVER MEDAL FOR VALOUR.

Lieut. W. S. Shepherd, M.C. 25/5/17.

NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS AND MEN

DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL.

5509 Pte. A. Brown. 11/3/16. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion in tending and bringing in wounded men under heavy rifle-fire.

203241 Pte. E. Burchell. 3/10/18. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He held an isolated post with ten men for two days, being continually in danger of being cut off. He also maintained continuous communication with his company headquarters through heavy shell-fire. Throughout he showed great ability and performed most valuable work.

10933 Pte. W. Carter. 3/7/15. For conspicuous gallantry on March 11th, 1915, at Neuve Chapelle when he went out under very heavy fire and rescued a wounded man. Whilst performing this act of bravery, he was himself shot through the eyes and will probably be blind for life.

10585 Pte. F. Dyke. 19/8/16. For conspicuous gallantry and resource as a telephone linesman. On several occasions during bombardments previous to an assault, he kept up communication and repaired and maintained telephone lines under the heaviest shell-fire. His services were invaluable and he always performed his work with coolness and courage under the most dangerous conditions.

8829 L./Cpl. H. W. Fox. 19/8/16. For conspicuous gallantry and resource as a telephone linesman. On several occasions during bombardments previous to an assault he kept up telephone communications, and repaired and maintained lines under the heaviest shell-fire. His services were invaluable and he always performed his work with coolness and courage under the most dangerous conditions.

- 21028 Pte. A. Gamsom. 3/9/18. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty during an attack. He was in charge of a Lewis-gun team in an isolated position. He behaved with great gallantry, keeping back a superior number of the enemy for hours, and carrying his gun under heavy fire across the open to get more ammunition. He did splendid work.
- 4757 Bandsman C. E. Hill. 14/1/16. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion in tending and bringing in wounded men under very heavy rifle-fire.
- 8402 Pte. W. H. Ladd. 3/6/15. For gallant conduct at Neuve Chapelle on the night of March 10th-11th, 1915, when he voluntarily brought in a machine gun from a very exposed position whilst exposed to very heavy fire.
- 11976 Pte. W. Luff. 26/9/16. For conspicuous gallantry during operations. He assisted a lance-corporal to mend the telephone wire seven times when it had been cut by shell-fire. All other wires having been cut, it was only by their wire that messages could be sent.
- 7384 L./Cpl. S. A. Merritt. 26/9/16. For conspicuous gallantry during operations. He mended telephone wires no less than seven times when it had been cut by shell-fire. All other wires through the wood had been cut, so that it was his line alone by which information could be sent back.
- 5018 Cpl. E. A. Player. 5/8/15. For conspicuous gallantry on May 17th and 18th, 1915, at Festubert. During the day he was continually working as a stretcher bearer under heavy shell-fire, and at night he organized the stretcher parties under the Medical Officer. On the 19th his gallant conduct and devotion to duty under heavy shell-fire was particularly noticeable.
Clasp to D.C.M., 14/1/16.
- 19801 Sergt. S. Robinson. 16/11/15. For conspicuous gallantry on September 25th, 1915, near Vermelles, when he advanced by a communication trench leading from a trench just to one held by the enemy with bombs, thus making certain that the trench was cleared of the enemy before it was blocked. On September 27th he crossed several hundred yards of open country under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire to fetch bombs which were urgently needed, and succeeded in bringing them to the front. In doing this, Sergt. Robinson's rifle was smashed by bullets and rendered useless.
- 19014 Pte. R. Skull. M.M. 9/7/17. For continuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He performed invaluable work as a runner and always displayed great coolness under fire.
- 7443 Sergt. D. G. Vardy. 14/1/16.
- 8801 Sergt. A. E. Wilson. 14/1/16.

MILITARY CROSS.

- 7500 C.S.M. J. H. Waite. 19/8/16. For conspicuous gallantry on patrol work when examining enemy trenches. His conduct in action has been courageous on all occasions. A capable leader.

MILITARY MEDAL.

- 26444 Pte. E. Austin, 18/10/18.
- 18162 Pte. J. S. Barnes, 19/8/18.
- 22954 Pte. W. E. Barnett, 18/10/18.
- 18501 L./Cpl. H. Beale, 11/11/16.
- 9860 Pte. F. C. Blake, 11/11/16.
- 17838 Sergt. F. E. Brooks, M.M. Bar to M.M., 28/9/17.
- 25531 Pte. H. R. Brooks, 28/9/17.
- 26585 Pte. F. Budd, 28/9/17.
- 18805 L./Cpl. A. Cary, 10/9/18.
- 18496 Pte. E. Catt, 21/10/16. For bravery in the field.
- 31832 Sergt. E. H. L. Chick, 18/10/18.
- 17701 L./Cpl. A. Cole, 29/8/18.
- 10496 Pte. F. A. Dobie, 11/11/16. For bravery in the field.
- 32650 Pte. W. H. Fry, 28/9/17.
- 12379 Pte. E. Goodman, 21/12/16. For gallant conduct in the field.
- 5187 Cpl. F. J. Gray, 22/1/17. For gallant conduct in the field.
- 10469 L./Cpl. A. W. Gadd, 18/10/18.
- 23184 Pte. S. A. Godfrey, 18/10/18.
- 26465 Pte. J. Graham, 7/2/19.
- 8347 Sergt. F. H. Holdman, 12/3/17.
- 11841 Pte. A. E. Harvey, 18/6/17.
- 29681 Pte. W. Hammacott, 14/8/17. Bar to M.M., 10/9/18.
- 33475 Pte. A. G. Haskett, 18/10/18.
- 7053 Sergt. A. T. Hobbs, 7/2/19.
- 28117 Pte. A. Higham, 7/2/19.
- 7292 Sergt. C. V. Jolliffe.
- 7452 Pte. C. E. Jefferies, 10/9/18.
- 10936 L./Cpl. W. Jackson, 16/11/16.
- 11668 L./Cpl. F. Jackson, 19/9/16.
- 11992 Pte. A. R. Jones, 18/11/18.
- 204266 Pte. J. P. Lucas, 10/9/18.
- 9209 Sergt. A. E. Martin. For gallantry in the field.
- 9558 L./Cpl. C. Miles, 11/11/16. For gallantry in the field.
- 8634 Sergt. A. R. Moore, 11/11/16. For gallantry in the field.
- 10894 Pte. E. W. Missen, 19/9/16. For bravery in the field.
- 10463 Cpl. A. Monaghan, 28/9/17.
- 20607 Sergt. R. O'Hara, 18/10/18.
- 10694 L./Cpl. G. Pipkin, 10/9/18.
- 8161 Sergt. W. E. Randall, 28/8/17.
- 7097 Cpl. T. Reeves, 28/9/17.
- 27002 Pte. A. G. Rogers, 10/9/17.
- 7214 Pte. C. Rosier, 18/10/18.
- 8554 C.S.M. Richens, about 15/8/16.
- 8766 Pte. C. Shaw, about 15/8/16.
- 13998 Pte. N. J. Sly, 11/11/16.
- 6748 Sergt. W. Snelgrove, 11/11/16.

Military Medal—continued

8215 L./Cpl. W. Sutton, 11/11/16.
19828 L./Cpl. T. Spence, 8/12/16.
7704 Sergt. W. H. Smith, 18/6/17.
19014 Pte. R. Skull, D.C.M., 4/6/17.
26823 L./Cpl. W. Sylvester, 27/7/18.
35773 Pte. R. W. Sweat, 10/9 18.
17972 Pte. W. T. Smith, 19/12/18.
9534 Sergt. B. Taylor, 14/8/17.
8300 C.S.M. A. Vinall, 11/11/16.
7080 L./Cpl. J. H. Whiting, 11/11/16.

CROIX DE GUERRE OF BELGIUM.

6079 R.S.M. A. T. Blake, 12/7/18.

RUSSIAN MEDAL OF ST. GEORGE (2ND).

5422 C.S.M. A. Gough. 15/2/17. For his services this warrant officer was later given a commission and posted to 1st Bn. D.C.L.I., where he gained the M.C. and also bar.

RUSSIAN CROSS OF ST. GEORGE (4TH).

11976 Pte. W. Luff, D.C.M. 15/2/17.

MEDAILLE MILITAIRE.

19801 Sergt. S. Robinson, D.C.M. 24/2/16. Awarded by the President of the French Republic in recognition of his distinguished service during the campaign.

MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL.

9140 C.S.M. W. C. Leighfield, 17/1/19.
8141 R.Q.M.S. J. M. Miller, 17/1/19.
8839 C.S.M. C. L. H. Neale, 17/1/19.
9329 L./Cpl. H. Newbury, 17/1/19.
8994 Sergt. E. Penn, 17/1/19.
11866 Cpl. R. Shelley, 17/1/19.

